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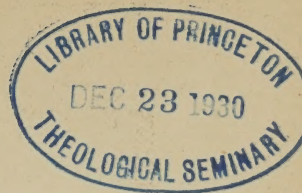
The evangelical succession





THE EVANGELICAL SUCCESSION





# The Evangelical Succession

OR

THE SPIRITUAL LINEAGE

OF THE

CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND MINISTRY

BEING THE TWENTY-NINTH FERNLEY LECTURE

*DELIVERED IN LONDON, JULY, 1899*

BY

THOS. F. LOCKYER, B.A.

London:

CHARLES H. KELLY

2 CASTLE ST., CITY RD., E.C.; AND 26, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

MDCCCXCIX





To  
One Dear Love  
Whose  
Light Of Evening  
Made All Things  
Beautiful

*The Glorious Company of the Apostles,  
The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets,  
The Noble Army of Martyrs,*

*Praise Thee ;*

*The Holy Church throughout All the World*

*Doth Acknowledge Thee.*

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# THE EVANGELICAL SUCCESSION

## Introduction

IT is not intended, in these pages, to attempt a refutation of the doctrine of so-called "Apostolical Succession" by dealing—at any length, or primarily—with the details of its claims; but rather, by presenting the alternative truth, to allow its own intrinsic reasonableness so to commend itself, and its beauty to become so manifest, that error shall have less power to deceive, and false glamour to attract. Such attempt may have, indeed, small title to originality; yet it may serve some purpose, if it help in any measure to recall our younger people to an appreciation of the glory of their spiritual heritage.

The real secret of the widespread triumph of "church" principles in our day has been, not the devotion of those who have adopted and inculcated them, though that has been great; still less the inherently convincing character of what is, after all, a stupendous assumption, even when it seems to be a closely reasoned argument; but the fact that a great, an imposing, and (granting the ever-present assumption) a consistent ideal has captivated the imagination, and thus conquered the faith, of those who have become its devotees. It is therefore our wisdom to let a

greater and truer ideal, if such may be found, by exerting its own proper attraction, more than neutralise the spell of this bewitching but evil dream. For, good as may be the motives of many of the adherents of that theory, and undeniably good as has been much of their work, yet the theory itself is essentially unspiritual, and the vice of unspirituality is apt to taint all its accompaniments, and to derogate from the best results.

Over against every worldly ideal, however religious its guise, the kingdom which is "not of this world" ever utters its decisive protest, and most decisively by asserting its own peerless claims. An attempt is made, in the following chapters, to exhibit the religion of Christ (as prepared for in the former times, and as afterwards fulfilled) under its essentially spiritual aspect, and as therefore free. The great spiritual commonwealth of the people of God claims free citizens, and its spiritual lineage, alike of privilege and of responsibility, is open only to the freedom of faith. This, then, is the true succession—evangelical, as distinguished from ecclesiastical, and asking the loyalty of unfeigned faith in Christ, rather than submission to the dictates of men.

Concerning the late Dean Butler, it was said, in review of his *Life and Letters*, and with seeming endorsement of his views expressed in the words quoted, "He had little sympathy with what he called the 'fierce and dangerous enthusiasm' of the Salvation Army, or with any form of mere emotional religion, and there is a characteristic passage in one of his letters that exemplifies his mode of thought: See how well our Wantage lads do in London. . . . Why? Because they have learned the real gospel—not the sham

thing that people call the gospel, all feelings and rubbish, but the gospel which Christ taught, which commands men to use the means of grace, to accept the ministrations of God's ministers, and to obey the Church. All this is definite and clear, something that one can understand. But 'Come to Christ,'—what does that mean? or, 'Have you found peace?'” (*Spectator*, Feb. 12, 1898). It would be hardly becoming, on our part, to volunteer a reply to those whose express business it is to make known the call of Christ, and to urge His message of reconciliation; but, for ourselves, this is, practically, the question that we have now to ask and answer.

Our appeal must be, primarily and supremely, to Scripture, but to Scripture as itself appealing to the mind and heart of man, and as attested alike by the resulting experience of those who receive its testimony, and by the broader effects of its accepted teaching in the history of the world. Due regard, indeed, should be paid to the perspective of Scripture teaching, the Old Testament being confessedly a preparation for the New, and moreover a progressive preparation; so that we may expect to find methods of divine discipline, intended to be only transitory, adapted to the imperfect spiritual apprehension of the people, or even as rendered necessary by their ill-developed morals. But the way of God's working was onward and upward, and His revelation came to its full-orbed splendour in the gospel of His Son. For the understanding of this gospel there needs no scholar's lore, nor the vantage of official place and power, but only a childlike willingness to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, that we may become wise unto salvation.

Jamais système n'a mis notre élévation dans une plus grande évidence. Tout esprit étant comme un monde à part, suffisant à lui-même, indépendant de toute autre créature, enveloppant l'infini, exprimant l'univers, est aussi durable, aussi subsistant, est aussi absolu que l'univers même des créatures. Ainsi on doit juger qu'il y doit toujours fait figure de la manière la plus propre à contribuer à la perfection de la société de tous les esprits ; qui fait leur union morale dans la Cité de Dieu.—LEIBNIZ, *Œuvres Philosophiques* vol. ii. p. 534.

Denn jene alle gehören zu dem Mechanismus, in den sich das Höchste zur Erreichung seiner Zwecke gliedert ; das wahrhaft Wirkliche, das ist und sein soll, ist nicht der Stoff und noch weniger die Idee, sondern der lebendige persönliche Geist Gottes und die Welt persönlicher Geister, die er geschaffen hat.—LOTZE, *Mikrokosmos*, vol. iii. p. 623.



## Chapter the First

### THE WORLD'S PROMISE

*For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off.—ACTS ii. 39.*

*That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise.—ROM. ix. 8.*

IN tracing our spiritual lineage, as children of God and servants of Christ, we must go back to the beginning. We shall thus see the subject in its true perspective; and, acquainting ourselves with the original charter of our rights and liberties, we shall be the better able afterwards to disentangle the true succession of living faith and holy ministry from those restrictions of later times, which are partly of human devising, and in any case the result of man's own unbelief and sin.

The early twilight of the world's day was still and pure; but ere it was well begun the gathering clouds portended storm, and even as the day was breaking

God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.

Nevertheless, the light of dawn was there, though tempest-tost; there were islets of blue where the clouds were rifting; and sweet gleams, as of a heavenlier day, stole forth from the lurid east, casting their light like a benediction across the troubled earth. Warning, condemnation,

sentence of death—these are the voices that we hear following one another all too swiftly. But the very condemnation is pitiful, as of One who “knoweth our frame”; and mingling with the sentence of death itself is the first utterance of the promise of life.

Such in brief is the record of that beginning of our history. “The Lord God planted a garden eastward, in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant and good; the tree of life also, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. ii. 8, 9). Here we have a picture of human existence and its possibilities: a central life that is divinely good, and that suffuses with its blessedness all surrounding creature good; but, as attendant upon this, the mysterious potentiality of evil. “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (ii. 16, 17). So are command and promise blended: the command peremptory, against all unlawful indulgence; the promise free and boundless, of all innocent delight. And beneath the very branches of the tree of life the warning speaks of death. Then the tragedy of the transgression darkens the fair scene; the heavens hide their light, and the threatened death befalls: while the transgressor, driven forth from Eden, carries with him the promise of a deliverance that shall undo the work of death—a promise which must mean that wrathful cherubim shall bar the way of the tree of life no longer, but that life forfeited shall be regained.

## I

Let us give our attention, in the first place, to the contents of this primeval promise made by God to man. Implicitly, as we have seen, it was a promise of life, even as the threatening had been a threatening of death.

“Thou shalt surely die”: it is not enough to say, in explanation of these words, that from the very day of the transgression man became liable to death, whether the death of the body, or the darker death beyond. This may be part of the truth; but it does not adequately interpret the unique decisiveness and precision of the statement. “In the day”—not as impending, nor even as beginning, but as actually and “surely” taking place. What was man’s best life?—was it not God’s favour, God’s likeness? This it is which manifestly crowns the ascending scale of the various orders of existence as described in the “Hymn of Creation” with which the Bible opens (Gen. i. 26, 27); and this was the life that was so immediately, so utterly lost in the very moment of the transgression. God’s favour, God’s likeness—both were gone: such was the bitterness of death.

But both should be restored: this is the essential meaning of the promise of life, and from the beginning this is the gift that God has purposed to give to man. For the primal promise has been repeated a thousandfold in the course of the passing ages, becoming clearer with each repetition, and manifesting more and more the fulness of its meaning. And, with whatever variety of presentation, and however rich the development, we find the same central and essential truth in the world’s promise

from its earliest utterance until the fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Let us look, by way of illustration, at some of the outstanding instances of the repetition of God's promise to men. To Abraham He said, "I will . . . be a God unto thee" (Gen. xvii. 7); to Moses, "I am . . . the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. iii. 6); and in like manner Moses urged the people, bidding them "cleave unto Him: for He is thy life" (Deut. xxx. 20). The unique meaning of this expression is made clear by our Lord's argument in conversation with the Sadducees: "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. xxii. 31, 32). That is, the relationship between God and His people is so intimate that their true life is in His love, and therefore the bare possibility of His ever casting them off into nothingness is unthinkable. The Psalms are full of this truth, and sometimes give explicit utterance to what is always the implied assumption, as just indicated, namely, that such life is itself the pledge of its own continuance. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy" (Ps. xvi. 11); "As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness" (xvii. 15); "O God, Thou art my God. . . . Thy lovingkindness is better than life. . . . My soul followeth hard after Thee" (lxiii. 1, 3, 8). To the same effect speaks the apostle: "We all, with unveiled face reflecting the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image" (2 Cor. iii. 18); and similarly it is said of

the saints made perfect, "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads" (Rev. xxii. 4). These, however, are only samples of the consistent teaching of the Scriptures. Patriarchs, prophets, psalmists, apostles—all agree in exhibiting the nature of that life which has been forfeited by the transgression, and restored by the promised redemption, as a life of trustful and loving fellowship with God.

Such life carries with it the pledge of all other life, even as the essential death involves death, sooner or later, in all the relations and aspects of man's existence. Just as by sin man became at war with himself, so by his restoration to the favour and likeness of God should he receive, through all the breadth and depth of his being, the benign and healing influence of reconciliation. For suspicion and strife between man and man, with their disastrous train of woes, there should be ushered in at last the golden age of amity and peace. And, though the law of mortality was to work its way, by disease and weakness, to an eventual dissolution of body and soul, and thereby to man's sunderance from the world in which he had lived and moved, yet the law of life was ultimately to triumph over death, man's bodily nature was to be reconstituted, and, as introduced into living relation to a renovated universe, he was to inherit all things.

## II

This being the life that was promised from the beginning, by virtue of the redemption which God purposed and announced for man, let us consider more closely the significance of the fact that, even as afterwards salvation

was proffered as a free gift, so in the earlier times it was presented to men under the form and fashion of a promise. For, if we would guard ourselves from misapprehension respecting the present administration of God's grace, and the conditions of its transmission (if indeed this word be at all allowable) from age to age, it is of no small moment that we consider well the method which God adopted at the first, and the way of His earliest approach to the souls of men.

It is to be noted, then, that in its first utterance the promise was entirely free. After the transgression, God was unsought by man; nay, He was shunned. "They heard the voice of the Lord God, and hid themselves" (Gen. iii. 8). Nor, when sought out by God, and questioned about their offence, did the offenders plead for terms; but God, in passing sentence of penalty, of His own free grace spoke words of promise. It is true that the promise was indirect, being interwoven with the sentence on the tempter; it was also enigmatical, not conveying to them the meaning which it now bears, as lighted up by the fulfilment of a later age. But it was free—free in its utterance, and free in its own character; imposing no terms, binding itself with no restrictions, and asking no sacrifice, save such as were necessarily involved in the actual acceptance of the promise. Freely it was vouchsafed; freely it must be received.

One such divine promise of redemption, launched on the stream of the world's history at its very source, is truly wonderful—wonderful in its utter freedom of grace. But the wonder grows when we consider the equally free reiteration of the promise, time by time, as the ages pass

away, and when we remark the gracious insistence and assurance with which God presses His promises on the acceptance of His people. Even to Cain He says, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Gen. iv. 7); to Noah, "I do set My bow in the cloud" (ix. 13); to Abraham, "I will bless thee; and be thou a blessing: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (xii. 2, 3); to Moses, "I have seen the affliction of My people; and I am come down to deliver them" (Exod. iii. 7, 8); to the people of Israel, by the word of Moses, "The Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee . . . and He will do thee good . . . for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good" (Deut. xxx. 3, 5, 9); and by the word of Joshua, "Ye know that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass" (Josh. xxiii. 14). In like manner Samuel declares, "The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake" (1 Sam. xii. 22); and Isaiah, "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. xxv. 9); even as God assures His people, "Thou art My servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. xli. 9, 10).

But why need we pursue the quest? The jewelry of the "precious and exceeding great promises," spoken of old, is not to be sought for painfully, as though it were

rare, and hidden out of sight; for it gleams about us everywhere as we wend our way along the course of time. We must not, however, omit to notice how the promise opens out, and develops its riches of beauty, as the world's era passes onward to its noon—like “the light of dawn, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” From the beginning the promise was personal: the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head—very mistakenly interpreted by Eve, who, when she bore Cain, said, “I have gotten a man, even the Coming One.” But how vague, as compared with the psalmist's portrayal of the gracious King, in whom all the world should trust (Ps. lxxii.); and with the prophet's picture of the sacrifice of love through which that kingship should be attained (Isa. liii.)! The image, looming dim through the mists of time, was at last brought to such focus, and shone out so clear, that one would have thought the “Behold” of the prophet (Isa. xlii. 1) needed but the responsive “Behold” of the herald (John i. 29), for men to recognise the ideal and the real as one, and thankfully adore.

What we are the most concerned with just now, however, is the freedom of the whole process. With what gracious spontaneity does the morning star of promise glide into the twilight sky; and how like the growing light of day, in its royal largess of blessing, does the world's promise make manifest its amplitude of meaning; and how like the light of day is its “going forth . . . unto the ends” of earth and heaven (Ps. xix. 6)! For the universality of the promise is one of the things that cannot be hidden, except from those who have blinded their eyes. Free as the very breath of life is this breath



of the better life. "All the families of the earth," "all nations," "the whole earth" (Gen. xii. 3; Ps. lxxii. 17; Isa. liv. 5)—such is the scope of God's promise of redemption. Is it objected that in the earlier years there was a policy of exclusion? that the scope of the promises was narrowed down to a family, a people, who alone were the elect of God? Then let it be remembered that only as guardians, not necessarily as inheritors, of the promise were they chosen; they were but appointed to watch the growth of the new-springing tree of life. Indeed, so untrue were they to their calling, that at last, in contemptuous unbelief, they turned away from what grew up before them "as a root out of a dry ground." Nevertheless, that "tender plant," so despised by its own custodians, has blossomed into beauty for those that will behold, and flings its fragrance abroad for the benediction of all who are willing to be blessed. And even as, at last, all those that will be made whole shall "have the right to come to the tree of life," laden with the fruitage of a fulfilled redemption, so, while as yet there was only the promise, "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Who, then, are the true inheritors of the promise of life, but they that believe? The promise itself must be as freely received as it is freely given. Here may be no mere mechanical assent, still less any compelled acceptance. Nor may the inheritance of the blessing be by "succession," save such as is constituted by those who enter successively into the freedom of faith. Neither "the children of the flesh" in former times, nor the children of "fleshly

ordinances" in later days, "are children of God; but the children of the promise." "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John i. 12, 13).

And as with the promise, so with the promised life. Inferior life may be communicated by mere creative will, as when God made the living creatures of the natural world; it may be transmitted also from organism to organism, the one knowing not what it does, nor the other what is done for it. But the life which is not of this world, being akin to God's own life, must participate in the same by the willing union of spirit with Spirit. Of this life it is true, as our Lord said to His chosen, "Freely ye have received." Nor can this free inheritance be in any wise restricted, save by the self-exclusion of unbelief; "for to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off."

## Chapter the Second

### THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

*But now apart from the law a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.—ROM. iii. 21.*

*Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham.—GAL. iii. 7.*

WE have thus far considered the promised salvation as consisting in a recovery to the life which had been forfeited by sin; and we have found that such life, by its very nature, must be entirely free, alike in its communication by God and in its reception by man. For it is a spiritual process that is involved on either side, and true spirituality must always mean liberty (see 2 Cor. iii. 17). In considering furthermore the fact that such a salvation is by promise, we have found the same implication of freedom; for a promise of grace on God's part can be nothing other than spontaneous, and man's acceptance of the promise must be equally free.

Let us now, at the cost of somewhat narrowing our outlook, so adjust the focus of vision as to gain a more precise idea of salvation in one particular aspect, namely, as a righteousness of God through faith. We shall find that both the righteousness itself, as bestowed by God, and the faith through which it is received by man, imply the same true spiritual freedom as was seen to be involved in the process of salvation more broadly considered.

## I

The gift of life has been defined above as a restoration both to God's favour and to God's likeness. Each of these aspects of man's recovery from the death of sin is more definitely, because more specifically, represented in the righteousness of faith.

God's character is consistently portrayed in Scripture as intrinsically and essentially moral or righteous; and God's righteousness is a living energy of righteousness, which will be satisfied with nothing less than perfect righteousness in others. There is the constraint of an infinite "Ought" in the heart of God, which has its response, sometimes partial yet always peremptory, in the heart of man. To this let the "Ten Words" of Horeb testify; let the visions of the prophets bear their witness; let the whole history of God's dealings with Israel tell its inward, but obvious, meaning. Startling at first sight as are the resemblances between those fragments of the mythology of kindred Semitic peoples which have been lately brought to light and the earliest biblical records concerning the same events, and though other resemblances of belief and religious custom arrest our attention and excite our wonder; yet far more striking, when properly considered, is this essential difference between the Hebrew and the non-Hebrew religions of the older world, that the former alone revealed an august and inflexible righteousness on the part of God, and demanded an answering righteousness on the part of man. Man's universal tendency is not so much to be irreligious, as to be more or less immoral in character and conduct, with an

enswathement (if we may so call it) of religious beliefs, sentiments, and observances, which is supposed to make him acceptable to God, which satisfies his co-religionists, and which disguises from himself his own true condition. This tendency has had almost full scope everywhere in heathendom, and within the range of revealed religion it maintains incessant warfare with the truth. Not by any means always a conscious hypocrisy, it is nevertheless relentlessly exposed as essentially hypocritical under the searching light of the judgment of the Holy One.

Was it, then, any wonder that, when He came into the world who is Light of Light, very God of very God, and whose mere presence, even without spoken words seemed to say to those that were hardening themselves in their sin, "Woe unto you, hypocrites!" the instinct of self-defence made such sin bitterly hostile to the Holy One of God? "He was in the world . . . and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not" (John i. 10, 11). This was the secret of the persistent and growing enmity of the priests, and of the fickle alienation of the people, leading to their so ready acquiescence in the final deed of death.

Pietism without true virtue, religiousness unaccompanied by righteousness, or even allowing and encouraging unrighteousness—this accords only too well with the instinctive impulse of the natural man. Meanwhile, religion and true piety denounce this unblushing caricature of themselves, and evermore insist on a rectitude of conduct, and an integrity of moral character, that shall take their pattern from the righteous God, and aspire to His perfec-

tion. "I am the Lord thy God: Thou shalt not!"—that is the measure of the divine forbidding of all unrighteousness (Exod. xx. 2); "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: Woe is me! I am undone"—this is the response of the contrite (Isa. vi. 3, 5); "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24)—such is the pleading cry of those that have felt the awful presence of the all-pervading God. "What doth it profit, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him? Pure religion and undefiled is this . . . to keep one's self unspotted from the world" (Jas. ii. 14, i. 27); "Like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living" (1 Pet. i. 15); "God is light: if we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in the darkness, we lie" (1 John i. 5, 6); "Building up yourselves on your most holy faith, keep yourselves" (Jude 20, 21); "Follow after the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14); "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, saith the Lord: therefore let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. vi. 17–vii. 1):—so do the apostolic teachers of the new covenant set forth the unabating stringency of God's claims upon us, that, believing in Him as righteous, we ourselves shall fulfil all righteousness.

But there is this initial difficulty, this fatal-seeming hindrance to all true aspiration, to say nothing of achievement, on the part of those who should be righteous, "that they are all under sin: there is no distinction, for all

have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 9, 22, 23). The record of the past being against us, and all our past being present to the righteous God,—who can never "let bygones be bygones" with the facile indulgence with which men so often allow themselves to leave the past behind,—how may we aspire, with this dead weight round the neck? how strive for the mastery, our hands and feet in chains? Moreover, even assuming the possibility of newness of life for those that are already under condemnation, how may condemned ones come into the favour of God? how may they find the forfeited status of righteousness?

Thus we perceive that, as was stated at the outset, restoration to God's favour and likeness requires the justification of those that have sinned, and at the same time the righteous renewal of the sinful. If this central necessity be not met, salvation in its larger scope is impossible.

## II

The fact that such restoration, though impossible with men, is possible with God, is of course involved in the promise of life which has been made known to those that are in the death of sin. This same promise, moreover, with its manifold and sweet insistence, implies also that the Righteous One, by whom such words are spoken, is graciously helpful and sympathetic; that He does not stand aloof from us, guilty though we be, but comes the nearer to us because we need Him more. Not that God's mercy and justice are contradictory in this matter, and need to be reconciled as from without; nor that as between

themselves they wage any semblance of conflict. On the contrary, God's righteousness itself demands that the sinner be saved from sin, if salvation be possible; and God's grace exerts itself for man's salvation, with righteousness as its chosen agency.

To give the transgressor once more a righteous standing before God, and to infuse a new energy of righteousness into those that have been bereft of all their power—this is the problem for God to solve; the problem that God's righteous grace, or gracious righteousness, has already solved. The promise, as we have seen, involves the possibility of performance; the offer of the gift is a pledge that the gift is prepared. How the problem has found solution, or what are the righteous reasons governing the work of grace—all this men may know only in part, or scarcely at all; God may at one time withhold His counsels, and again more fully disclose them; He may give the world a promise hidden in mystery (see 1 Cor. ii. 7), or in "the fulness of the time" He may "make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery" (Eph. iii. 9), Jesus Christ being "openly set forth crucified." But in either case, whether men have less or more understanding of the "why" and "how" of God's doings, whether they are as babes or as strong men in their discernment of the deep things of God, what is possible to them all, what is required of them all, is that they *believe*, taking on trust the declared redemption, receiving frankly the proffered gift.

This belief, or faith, is no mere assent of our thought, though assent is implied; nor is it the mere confidence of feeling, though such trustful sentiment is doubtless



grateful to God even as it is helpful to ourselves. But true faith is the entire outgoing of our soul to take hold of God's faithful goodness, alternating, or rather blended, with the reposeful willingness that God shall work in us His perfect will. Whether more passively or actively, faith is the renunciation of the wilful self, and the acceptance of God's will for our salvation. Were it not for this gracious righteousness outside of ourselves, as offered to the appropriation of faith, we could have neither help nor hope; and, were it anything less than a divine grace, a divine righteousness, our trust would be misplaced, and the seeming help would fail us. But, taking hold of God, of God's promises, of God's strength, and opening our hearts to receive His hallowing, cleansing, energising love, we are lifted above ourselves, out of the shame of our guilt and the paralysis of our despair, and we feel through all our soul the glow, the thrill, of those that are newly born of God.

Faith, then, being of such sort, it necessarily counts for righteousness in God's sight, as being the one only but sufficient instrumentality and inspiration of a righteous standing as regards the past, and a new power of righteousness for the future. God beholds the past cancelled by a faith which, taking Him at His word, accepts His justifying grace; He sees the future already pledged to a life of loyal love by the faith which makes God's holy love its own.

That no "law" is able to effect such transformation is evident. The law, so far as it relates to moral duty, can only command, and the commandment slays, rather than restores, the sin-stricken soul of man. Thundering forth

its anathema against transgression, it overwhelms us with condemnation; summoning us with sovereign authority to obey, it casts us back on our utter impotence. When, however, it is made known that God provides, not merely for the pardon of our offences, as though sin were only a personal wrong that might be overlooked by His goodwill, but for our rehabilitation in His favour, as of those against whom the law of righteousness may now utter no condemning word; then faith in God's justifying grace renders us righteous before God, in the sense that we are reinstated in His holy regard. And, when the same grace of God would work, with strong yet tender constraint, for our effectual deliverance from sin, and for the attainment of all true good, by faith we become participators in God's own life of holy love. In either case, it is a faith which makes, swiftly and surely, for righteousness.

A righteousness, then, "apart from the law," but "witnessed by the law and the prophets," is available by faith. "Apart from the law," as we have just seen, inasmuch as it was "what the law could not do"; and so entirely apart from the law of the Mosaic dispensation that it dates from a far anterior time, the great typical instance being that of Abraham. But "witnessed by the law": for every commandment of righteousness spoken by God to sinful men carries with it the implication of a possible redemption outside of its own range, inasmuch as God would not mock us in our helplessness by commands that could only condemn; and the Mosaic law, with multitudinous rites and sacrifices, sets forth that same redemption. Righteous reinstatement, righteous renewal—these are the watchwords of the law, this is its prophetic testimony. And "wit-

nessed by the prophets": for, when we read, as in Isaiah, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins"; "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee" (xliii. 25, xliv. 22); or, as in Ezekiel, "When the wicked turneth from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby" (xxxiii. 19); in the one case explicitly, and in the other implicitly, testimony is borne to the same purpose of God, that "the just shall live by his faith" (Hab. ii. 4).

Who, then, are in the succession of God's righteousness? they that trust in God's righteous love, or those who conform to ordinances which in any case only serve, and that but partially, to make known the same? those who comply with the supposed requirements of a "law" which is the belated reproduction of a temporary expedient in the history of God's dealings with a people for whom no more spiritual treatment would avail, or they that would fain hearken to such words of truth and grace as fulfil the promises and prophecies of the earlier and of the latter time? Just as God's righteousness towards man is the living energy of His free, holy will; so must man's righteousness towards God be the free, earnest response of a living, loving faith. "Know therefore that they which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham."

## Chapter the Third

### LAW, PRIESTHOOD, AND SACRIFICE

*The law of a carnal commandment.*—HEB. vii. 16.

*Carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation.*

HEB. ix. 10.

WE are now brought to a more direct consideration of that Levitical aspect of the Mosaic economy of which modern sacerdotalism is the illogical and illegitimate reproduction. The "law" was what certain Judaising Christians clamoured for in the days of the apostle Paul; the same "law" essentially, although the name be not used, is the present-day substitute for "the liberty of the glory of the children of God."

The very word "law" is ambiguous, and the ambiguity is the more embarrassing because the same law, as given by Moses, was a unity in which moral and ceremonial commands not only met together, but overlapped and commingled. The ceremonial law had its moral sanctions; the moral law had its ceremonial symbols and expression. Yet in thought they are separable, even as in their working they are, broadly speaking, sufficiently distinguishable the one from the other. Moreover, the essential distinction between them is of such sort that, whereas the one endures for ever, it is clear that the other was meant, having fulfilled its temporary purpose, to pass away.

Nevertheless, it is just this latter "law"—the law of ceremony, the law of symbolism—which some would fain perpetuate in the Christian Church. In some cases, indeed, it would almost seem as though the "commandment" of which there has been "a disannulling because of its weakness and unprofitableness" (Heb. vii. 18)—a merely temporary expedient, adopted by reason of man's infirmity, and therefore partaking of the infirmity—were exalted above that law of righteousness which, being rooted and grounded in God, "abideth for ever." Nor the law alone, as so much ceremonial and symbolism, but the whole triple system of which it formed a part—law, priesthood, and sacrifice—all this, with the imposition of Christian names, and the atmosphere of Christian sentiment, it is sought to establish as being the true religion of Him in whom these things are at once fulfilled and done away.

To argue the most effectively against such an assumption, it would only need that we should quote at large the Epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans, of the apostle Paul, and the Epistle to the Hebrews, in each of which the unreality of such a cult, as anything more than a series of stepping-stones to aid the way of the weak to Christ in the foregoing years, is shown so completely and conclusively, that one wonders, but for man's unlimited capability of perverting the truth, how an error so utterly slain could ever live again. The apostle himself marvelled that the Galatians were "so quickly removing unto a different gospel" (Gal. i. 6); and he asked, "How turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again?" (iv. 9)—implying that the Judaism of which they were becoming enamoured,

and the heathenism from which they had been saved, were in this respect on the same level, that both alike were sensuous and materialistic, as opposed to the "freedom" with which "Christ set us free." In writing to the Romans, though his argument deals chiefly with the relation of the gospel to the moral law of the elder covenant, he presents it as an obvious truth that the ceremonial law was of no value save as an elementary spelling-book to teach the meaning of the law of righteousness, alike in its present claims and for its future hopes: "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. ii. 28, 29). The meaning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as regards that faulty "first covenant," how that, "becoming old," it is "nigh unto vanishing away" (Heb. viii. 7, 13)—this he that runs may read.

Inasmuch, however, as such a system, now divinely discarded, was once divinely adopted,—not preferentially, as of any intrinsic excellence, but as being the best suited to the people, for disciplinary purposes, at that stage of their history,—it becomes not superfluous to examine more closely its educational significance, if we would understand what is obsolete, and what has abiding value for Christians, of the law, priesthood, and sacrifice of former days.

## I

Bearing in mind, then, the blended and manifold meaning of the Mosaic law, as at once moral and ceremonial, the ceremonial law moreover both symbolising the require-

ments of the law of righteousness and foretoking the redemption in which alone the claims of righteousness should be fulfilled, let us inquire how far it was admittedly partial and preliminary in its character, and to what extent it was further misunderstood and perverted by men; then we shall recognise the true fulfilment of its one aspect, and the utter abolition of the other, in Christ Jesus.

As a law of righteousness, the commandments of Sinai were the utterance of the unchangeable divine hostility to sin, and of God's peremptory prohibition of the same, whether in the ages long ago or to-day, whether in this world or in any other actual or possible abode of beings to whom such commandments might convey any meaning. The validity of such a law was absolute; its authority can never be impaired. Men may grow out of the swaddling-clothes of mere custom; but they can no more grow out of the obligation of the moral law than they can grow out of their own nature. The moment the former is ignored, the latter is belied; to flout the law of righteousness is to make sardonic mockery of their own souls.

Moreover, the way in which the law, as thus promulgated in its few great, comprehensive prohibitions of sin, was afterwards made visible in the enactments of an elaborate ceremonial, and divided itself into multitudinous regulations dealing with all the detail of the people's doings—this does but portray the refusal of God's law to stand aloof from man's daily life, and its claim, on the contrary, to the full allegiance of every trivial-seeming action, and of all the minutiae of habit and behaviour, to that righteousness whose authority is as omnipresent as the God of whom it testifies.

But who is sufficient for these things? The stern prohibition of sin, uttered once for all, and then following us closely, in our work and in our rest, when we mingle with the crowd and while we abide alone, whether we attend to life's more serious business or lightly beguile the leisure hour, affording no interval, allowing no pause, but demanding that in all things, from the least to the greatest, we keep ourselves undefiled—who can fulfil this law, so searching in its scrutiny, so tireless in the tracing of our way? Was this the questioning of the devouter Israelites, as beneath the surface of the ceremonial enactments of their law they read that hidden meaning? Then that same law pictured forth a redemption that should make all things possible, and already, as by anticipation of a better day, presented its virtue for the acceptance of faith.

There is much here, again, that may not be outgrown. God cannot cease to claim the allegiance of all our life, far more minutely indeed than could be set forth in symbol by the law of old; our secret thoughts, our words and ways—they are all under His governance, and must submit to His fashioning. Nor will God fail to afford His gracious help, that we may fulfil all righteousness; His promised redemption He will perform in our behalf, even to the uttermost. But with a fulfilled redemption we no longer need the symbols that faintly adumbrate the reality; having it so near in fulfilment, we may not behold it afar. Nor, with the inspiration of God's mighty love moving us, can we allow ourselves to be restrained in our devotion by punctilious observances that become tyrannous in their puerility so soon as the inward secret is apprehended—the secret of love's utter loyalty.



Even concerning the great commands, which, as evidencing God's hostility to sin, are yesterday, to-day, and for ever the same, it must yet be remembered that not in the same way do they utter their prohibition to the rebellious and to the contrite; not identically are they expressed from the midst of "a palpable and kindled fire" on the awful mount, and to those that have "come unto Mount Zion," with its fellowship of living love (Heb. xii. 18-24). Negatively, in the one case, and with awful rigour, they prohibit; in the other positively, and with the constraint of infinite grace, they persuade. "Thou shalt not!"—thus is sin forbidden, as with the thunder-tones of judgment; "*thou shalt*"—thus, with the still small voice of ineffable tenderness, are urged the claims of love, of that love which is the fulfilling of the law.

For every aspect of the law, then, there is a fulfilment in the gospel, which secures its true worth and meaning, at the same time that it corrects or supersedes whatever was one-sided or of transitory value. As for the perversion of the law by human wilfulness or crassness, it need scarcely be said that this finds no indulgence. Yet the old-time perversion has its modern counterpart. The one exhibited, even as does the other, a false authority; an authority, in either case, external, as being the authority of institutions, and withal harsh, exacting, tyrannous. With the former, it was the authority of temple or synagogue, and of the letter of the law, as manipulated by the laborious ingenuity of rabbinism; with the latter, it is the kindred authority of church and of rubric, as likewise monopolised and managed by man. But, as opposed to these perversions, even the stern prohibitions of the elder law sought

confirmation of their authority in the response of conscience; and the true authority of the gospel is of Christ in the heart.

## II

Intimately associated with the law are priesthood and sacrifice, these three being mutually involved, and constituting together one complete system. Priesthood is by the law, and the law was received under the priesthood (Heb. vii. 5, 11, 28); while in both of them is implied sacrifice, and sacrifice implies them both (viii. 3, 4; ix. 9, 10).

The essential idea of priesthood is mediatorship. Common to mankind everywhere is the felt necessity for mediation, that there may be approach to God. Mediatorship is as universal a postulate of religion as prayer. The sense of this need is mostly instinctive and undefined, but when analysed it is found to be related to almost every faculty of our nature. Our thought cannot grasp the absolute; our affections cannot easily make their home in the invisible and infinite; while the allegiance of our will, the earnest devotion of our life, claim a more tangible attraction than that of the hidden God. Even the abuses of religion testify to this need. The idolatry of the heathen; the pictures and images, and the invocation of saints and angels, of a degenerate Christian worship; and the priesthoods of all peoples, bear witness, however superstitiously, to man's requirement that some one shall come between himself and God.

This instinctive religious craving was recognised in the appointment of a priesthood under the old dispensation.

Not that the priesthood met the necessity; it rather symbolised the pleading want of the worshipper, at the same time that it foretokened the ordainment of the one only Priest who can truly mediate between God and sinful men, and whose mediation, as thus anticipated, availed already for those that came, with humble faith, to God. Yet how great the contrast between the many priests and the One! They were "made after the law of a carnal commandment"; but He, "after the power of an endless life" (Heb. vii. 16). They were a multitude, ever changing—this signifying the inefficacy of their office and work; "but He, because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable" (vii. 23, 24). They were sinners, as mediating for sinful men; but He is the "undefiled," "perfected for evermore" (vii. 26–28). Theirs was a ministry of shadowy imitation; His is the reality which they copied feebly and afar (viii. 5, 6).

The only true mediatorship, therefore, is that of the "strong Son of God," who was also Son of Man, and who is alone the "Way" to the Father. Whatever quasi-mediatorship there may be in the world to-day is not the mediatorship of men whose qualification is that they wear the robes and observe the rules; but rather, of those who "have the mind of Christ," who have learned the secret of His sympathy, and whose one desire is "that Christ," not themselves, "shall be magnified." They are mediators only in the derivative sense that they help men to trust in the mediatorship which is alone availing, alike for themselves and for others; thus they point the way to the kingdom, rather than bar it, keeping "the keys," if at all, not to exclude, but that they may open wide the door.

## III

What was said above concerning the universal need of mediatorship is equally true of man's sense of the necessity of sacrifice. Indeed, stronger than any other reason for man's requirement of a mediator is the sense of sin, which, however vague and feeble, makes him seek a mediation that shall propitiate and reconcile. Thus almost every religious cult has its gifts, intended to appease; and a predominant feature of many religious systems has been the sacrifice of slain victims. Mistaken, and often grossly superstitious, have been the notions that have prompted the offering of sacrifices, and cruelly repulsive have been the methods of such sacrifice; but in the midst of all the mistakes, and at the heart of all the superstition, has been the essentially true constraint of conscience, signifying God's displeasure because of transgression, and the need of some objective atonement to reconcile man to God.

Sacrifice, it need scarcely be said, was an equally predominant feature of the Mosaic covenant. There was no connivance at superstitious thoughts concerning God; there was no allowance of cruelty. On the contrary, a universally prevalent system was adopted,<sup>1</sup> with such modifications and safeguards as should help to correct the mistakes of men concerning these things, and with such

<sup>1</sup> "The first requisite to appreciating what is peculiar to the religion of Israel, and consequently also what is the purport of Old Testament Revelation, is to discern clearly the elements in that religion which were common to other Semitic religions. Criticism and archaeology alike warn us that the practice of animal sacrifice and the elaborate Jewish ritual were not the subject of God's special revelation to and through the race."—G. Buchanan Gray's review of Driver and White's *Leviticus*, in the *Christian World*, July 21, 1898.

concurrent teaching as should gradually prepare the people for the entire abolition of what might be necessary temporarily because of the hardness of their heart, but of which it has always been true, "Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein" (Heb. x. 8). But the essential truth expressed by these things was very solemnly enforced, namely, that sin must be punished, and that without true atonement the sinner must die. The sacrifices that emphasised this truth were also prophetic, as indicating to the faith of the humble and contrite offerer that God would "provide the lamb for an offering," even as Abraham had been taught long before (Gen. xxii. 8). Those sacrifices themselves could not "take away sins"—it was an intrinsic impossibility (see Heb. x. 4, 11); but they could, and did, declare that sin must be taken away, if man would find acceptance with a holy God, and that God Himself would take it away, providing His own propitiation. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . . Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well" (Isa. i. 11, 16, 17); "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? . . . He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. vi. 6-8); "For Thou delightest not

in sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 16, 17):—such is the highest teaching of the Old Testament, identical with the argument of the Epistle to the Hebrews, respecting that inner significance of sacrifice which alone is in God's sight of any worth.

This, then, is the meaning which finds fulfilment in the sacrifice of Christ, the outer husk and covering being now cast away. "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29)—such is the consistent and urgent announcement of the gospel. God, not man, provides the propitiation, though only by the concurrence of faith does it become a propitiation in behalf of the offerer; and so complete is the propitiation, as thus effected, that an attempt to repeat, or to supplement it, is, however unintentionally, the greatest affront to God's mercy and truth. "Once for all" (Heb. vii. 27); "once . . . to put away sin" (ix. 26); "having been once offered" (ix. 28); having "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (x. 12); "there is no more offering for sin" (x. 18)—thus are we taught the completeness, the finality, of the atonement of Christ. Shall we, then, allow ourselves to believe that, by man's manipulation, bread and wine become a repetition of that finished sacrifice, and that only by this means sinful men are saved? and shall our trust be transferred to a priesthood which, by a like manipulation, becomes endowed with this transforming power? Or shall we not rather have "boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus"? shall we not "draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith" (Heb.

x. 19, 22)? "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7); so that "we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle" (Heb. xiii. 10).

In all these matters, therefore, we must make our choice between a mechanical and a spiritual succession: between the lineage that derives from a law of "carnal ordinances," "added because of transgressions" (Gal. iii. 19), and "imposed until a time of reformation," with its priesthood of carnal officialism, offering carnal sacrifices; and an ancestry of the spirit, drawing its vitality and inspiration from the inward and spiritual meaning of the law, priesthood, and sacrifices of former days: between that which was discarded, and that which is for ever fulfilled, in Christ.<sup>1</sup> We must choose between "the letter" that "killeth," and "the spirit" that "giveth life" (2 Cor. iii. 6); between a mediatorship of many men, standing between as hinderers rather than helpers of our faith, and the strong, brotherly compassion and help of the "one Mediator, Himself man, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. ii. 5); between a sacrificial system under control of men, subject to strict limitations of time and place, and liable to impairment or falsification by the infirmity or fraud of man, and the all-

<sup>1</sup> "Catholicism is here the precise opposite of this aboriginal Religion, this Christianity of Christ and His apostles. The priesthood is essential to it; without the priesthood it could have no existence, no Saviour present in its services, no mass, no sacraments, no confessional; in a word, no worship for God, no comfort and no command for man. . . . The sacerdotal idea has a perfectly distinct history of its own; the date of its first appearance in the Church can be fixed, its rise can be traced, its growth measured, its action on the substance and organisation of Christianity analysed and exhibited."—Fairbairn, *Catholicism: Roman and Anglican*, p. 170.

availling merit of the Cross of Christ, which reconciles to God, and makes us "nigh" that were "far off" (Eph. ii. 13). In short, we must choose between that which is of the elements of this world, and which is therefore powerless to redeem the living soul, and a worship and service which are instinct with the energy of God's own living and redeeming will.

Such, however, seems to be the infatuated choice of multitudes, that words which were addressed to a beguiled people long ago, by one who was in amazement because of their delusion, are not superfluous to-day: "O foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly set forth crucified? This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?" (Gal. iii. 1-3). From another apostle, also, it were well that the warning were heeded, "Now therefore why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts xv. 10).



## Chapter the Fourth

### COVENANT AND PROPHECY

*A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul.—GAL. iii. 17.*

*As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began.—LUKE i. 70.*

IF the foregoing account of the ceremonial law of Israel be correct, as showing it to have been indeed divinely instituted, but to have assumed its actual form because of the prevalent customs of the Semitic world, and thus to have been an accommodation to the tastes and habits of the Hebrew people, it will be evident that such an institution was of secondary importance, as being only the framework within which the meaning of God's true law might be made known. The ceremonial law, with its constituents of priesthood and sacrifice, being thus the inferior part of Old Testament religion, and, though valid, possessing but a transitory value, it will be necessary to inquire further what were the better elements, of more abiding worth, which gradually asserted their significance, and which were not so much superseded, as fulfilled and perfected, in the new economy.

These latter, as constituting at once the interpretation of the former, and the inspiration of the whole religion of Israel, we shall find to be sufficiently indicated by the two great kindred principles of covenant and prophecy.

## I

God's promise to the world, as we have already seen, dates from the beginning, being coeval with the transgression; and this promise seems first to have taken the more definite form of a covenant at the time of the new beginning of human history after the abatement of the deluge. But even so, it was retrospective, as interpreting God's attitude towards the world during the foregoing ages; for this had been essentially, though not so expressly, the attitude of One in covenant with mankind. Nor with man alone, but with all nature, as participating in the penalty of sin; for God had said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Gen. iii. 17). The foretold redemption, however, should extend its influence to the farthest verge of the effects of disobedience: "For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it; in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 20, 21).

To Noah, it might well seem that the devastating flood foretokened the final doom of nature; and therefore, for the reassurance of man's faith, there was not only the reannouncement of the promise, but this promise took the form of an express and explicit covenant. "God spake unto Noah, saying, Behold, I establish My covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you. I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be

a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. I will remember My covenant . . . the everlasting covenant" (Gen. ix. 8-17). Here are two things to be distinguished—and to bear this in mind will help us in the subsequent discussion: the covenant, and the covenant-token; the one all essential, the other fitting and helpful, but not absolutely necessary. God expressly pledged Himself—that is the main thing: pledged Himself to be mindful of mankind, and to deliver the world from death. There may be—there shall be—cloud and darkness and storm; but the darkness shall not vanquish light, the storm shall not repress for ever the shining of the sun. "I do set My bow in the cloud." Thus the very disasters of the world shall serve as occasions for God's deliverance, and His love shall make manifest its gracious beauty by reason of the distresses that seem to signify its undoing.

From the great nature-covenant made with Noah—that is, the covenant made with man as related to nature, and more or less involved in nature's fortunes and destiny—we pass to the history-covenant made with Abraham, that is, with Abraham in his ancestral character as the father of the chosen race. "The word of the Lord came unto Abram, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. xv. 1). Then followed the assurance that his posterity should be as the stars, and also that they should inherit the promised land. "In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto

thy seed have I given this land" (xv. 18). Again, "the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee for an everlasting covenant. And as for thee, thou shalt keep My covenant" (xvii. 1-9). We then read of the adoption of what was probably a prevalent custom—the custom of circumcision—as "a token of a covenant" (xvii. 11); in itself of no value, save as signifying on man's part the fulfilment of the command, "Walk before Me, and be thou perfect." But God pledged Himself that, if Abraham and his seed would be mindful of God's claims upon their obedience and love, God would make human history, with all its seeming confusions and contradictions, to work out His will and their true good.

When the covenant had thus been established with man, first in his relation to nature, and again as participating in the course of human history, it remained to be reasserted, and with the most solemn sanctions, in regard to the law of righteousness. God appeared to Moses at Horeb, as the "I AM THAT I AM" (Exod. iii. 14), indicating that He was unalterably bent upon the fulfilment of His pledge, unchangeably active in working out His will. "God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am JEHOVAH"; and He went on to say, "I have remembered My covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am Jehovah . . . I will redeem you: and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and

ye shall know that I am Jehovah" (vi. 2-8). Then was wrought for Israel, almost hopeless in its bitter bondage, the great emancipation, God showing Himself, by manifold tokens, the Lord of nature, and Lord of the changes and destinies of nations, in behalf of those whom He would redeem. But, when the work was wrought, and the delivered people were gathered about the holy mount, there followed the solemn pronouncement of the great commands of righteousness, of which Moses said afterwards, "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb" (Deut. v. 2). He was the One, the Only, the Holy God; they must be a people separate from sin, in all things fearing the Lord and working His holy will. The "token," on God's part, consisted of "the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exod. xxxi. 18); concerning which God said, when they were about to be rewritten, "Behold, I make a covenant. Observe thou that which I command thee. Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land. . . . And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. . . . And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments" (xxxiv. 10-12, 27, 28). The "Book of the Covenant," as comprised in Deuteronomy xii.-xxvi., was only the elaboration, in detail, of the same law;<sup>1</sup> and this, with the "tables of the testimony," was put in the "Ark of the Covenant," so called as containing these tokens and signs of God's agreement with His people (see Exod. xxv. 16;

<sup>1</sup> See *The Literary Study of the Bible*, chap. xx.; and *The Modern Reader's Bible: Deuteronomy*; by Richard G. Moulton.

Deut. xxxi. 26). The token, on man's part, was renewed day by day in the symbolism of the ritual law.

This triple covenant of God with man—as related to nature, to history, and to righteousness—was implied, as we have seen, in the first promise of redemption; and, being made thus express and emphatic, in its several parts, at these successive stages of God's dealings with men, it remained in force through the subsequent generations, and is still in force to-day. God has not gone back upon His word. He is still the "I AM THAT I AM," fulfilling Himself for His people. The tokens of the covenant may vary from age to age; the covenant itself is unalterable. To all that believe in Him He will manifest Himself as the Lord of righteousness, the Ruler of history, and the God of the universe. Vice cannot thwart Him, the world-powers cannot resist His will, the catastrophes of nature cannot imperil His purpose. Let man only believe, with the living faith that loves and serves, and the God with whom he thus enters into holy covenant will save with a full salvation. This means that the heart shall be aflame with a transforming love, that the life shall be filled with ennobling ministries of love, and that, by man's willing obedience, the way shall be prepared for the coming of God's kingdom.

But we are anticipating. In all this is implied a covenant of grace; and it was the covenant of grace, as made explicit in itself, and as taking within its own encompassment the significance and sanctions of the former covenants, that was declared and ratified in the life and death of Jesus Christ. His very name—"Jesus," or "Jehovah our Salvation" (Matt. i. 21)—was the ancient

covenant name of God, once more re-uttered, and stamped with its final meaning. His official title—as the “Christ,” or “Anointed”—bore witness that God’s accomplishment of His saving purpose was at hand. At the very outset of this new era of grace, when the child that should be the prophet of the Highest was named for his mission (“John,” or “Jehovah had Mercy”), his father, filled with the Spirit, sang of Him who had “visited and wrought redemption for His people . . . to show mercy, and to remember His holy covenant” (Luke i. 68, 72). The whole of our Lord’s ministry—His words of truth and grace, and His works of holy love—was a setting forth of the covenant, and an invitation to the people that, on their part, they should trust and be true. With the invitation, indeed, was blended solemn warning; for, if they despised the covenant, where was their hope? “Except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins” (John viii. 24; see Heb. x. 29). Thus did He bear witness of Himself as the Covenant Saviour (John viii. 13, 14); and at the last He sealed the covenant with His blood (see Luke xxii. 20).

When the apostles began their work as His witnesses, they reminded the people of “the covenant which God made with” their “fathers,” now fulfilled in “His Servant” (Acts iii. 25, 26). The apostle Paul vindicates the heirship of all believers, as rightfully claiming the fulfilment of that covenant which long ante-dated the law, and should itself abide now that the law had done its tutorial work, and was properly passing away (Gal. iii. 15–17, 23–25). In like manner, the great anonymous interpreter of the ancient religion—as finding its true fulfilment in the new—insists with irresistible urgency upon the irrefragable

suretyship, the spirituality, the sovereign efficacy, of what he calls the new, the better covenant (Heb. vii. 22, viii. 6-13, ix. 15).

This covenant of grace has its "tokens," as had the earlier; but they are of the simplest, and are valid only for what they signify. In either case, the token is as much for a testimony to others as for an assurance to the participant, having in each respect its significant value. Baptism into the name of the Covenant God, as first instituted, meant indeed such an assent to the covenant as would help to make one's own faith more definite and real; but it was yet more important as a well understood form of "confession"—the confession before others of what constituted one's own hope of salvation. Similarly, the partaking together of the Lord's Supper, while encouraging an intenser faith in Him whose free gift of Himself to His people, in His life and by His death, was thus vividly expressed, served also to make Christ more fully known to men as Saviour and Lord.

## II

Inasmuch as God's covenant, though having its various outward signs, was itself, from the beginning, essentially spiritual, there was a necessity for such instruction and interpretation, from time to time, as should keep alive among the people the knowledge of its true meaning, and call them off from that dependence upon the sign which would weaken their hold upon the thing signified. More especially was this the case with regard to the ritual law of Israel, an elaborated symbolism—its material of human origin, but selected and arranged under divine control—



which betokened, to Israel itself and to the nations round, the claims of God upon human character and conduct, and the need of divine help that those claims might be satisfied. In other words, the "law" was a prolonged "token" of the covenant relationship on either side, showing, in its own pictorial way, what God would do for man, and what man must do for God. Like every other token, it was itself valueless, having a relative worth just so long and in so far as it enabled men the better to understand those moral and spiritual truths which it stood for, and dropping off, like the husk from the fruit, when its work was done. A spiritual ministry, therefore, was needed, for the present interpretation of the law's significance, and for its ultimate supersession. In other words, an order of prophets must guard the people against the perils involved in an order of priests, and the better they did their work the sooner might the priesthood, with all its accompanying cult, be abrogated. The more divine, and therefore truer human, was to assert itself more and more, that such institutions as belong to humanity on its lower levels might become superfluous. All human priesthood, as related to a mechanical form of religion,—the religion of observance, formula, and routine,—is only a subordinate and temporary expedient; whereas prophecy, which interprets and assists the direct spiritual intercourse between God and man, is an essential and abiding work.

This double ministry is well contrasted in the persons of the two men who were its leading representatives at the time when Israel began to be a nation: Moses and Aaron. From them the two lines derive; to them may be traced back, respectively, the ancestry (humanly regarded) of such

as claim to be fulfilling a divine ministry to-day. The one, if their work be true, are in the lineage of the prophets of God's kingdom, receiving alike their call and their inspiration from above, and owing to their prophetic predecessors, not the tactual transmission of authority or grace, but the kindling of soul with soul, the inspiration of truth and love. The other, so far as their own theories and dreams will avail to accomplish it, are linked on to the priesthood of an immature, and now obsolete, epoch in the development of the race, and claim an authority—of garb, phrase, and ritual—which is as different from the prophetic authority of conscience and sympathy as death from life. These say to those, "You are not priests, as we are"; surely those should thank God that it is even so, and should pray that both they and their gainsayers may be counted not unworthy to fulfil some part as prophets of the Highest.

For, taking the priesthood at its best, as represented by its great progenitor, Aaron, we find it even thus early giving signs of that lack of moral earnestness which, in the absence of prophetic warning and exhortation, is apt to prove fatal to the best interests of both priests and people. "The people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us. . . . And all the people brake off the golden rings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received it at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. . . . And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play" (Exod. xxxii. 1-6). May we not, therefore, well understand, alike

the entire supremacy of Moses as regards the whole priestly system, and his parting declaration to Israel that, in the times to come, when they should be in peril because of the abominations of the heathen,—abominations closely connected with the priestly systems of those peoples,—it should not be their own priests from whom saving counsels might be expected to proceed, but, “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deut. xviii. 15)? Was not the contrast strikingly exhibited, and the fulfilment of this prediction exemplified, in the case of Eli and Samuel? the former bringing upon himself the rebuke, “Did I reveal Myself unto the house of thy father? and did I choose him to be My priest? I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever. But now, be it far from Me. I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind” (1 Sam. ii. 27–35). The next chapter tells us how these words were fulfilled. The child Samuel became the religious leader of the people—not a true priest, according to those who might judge by the letter, for he was not of the house of Aaron; and not, we may well suppose, wishful to attest his priesthood by the minute observance of such formulæ as the house of Eli may have scrupulously observed, immoral as they were: but a true priest in that broader, nobler sense in which God used the word when warning Eli—religious leader, helper, friend of Israel; and all this just in proportion as he “was established to be a prophet of the Lord” (1 Sam. iii. 20). It was as much as to say, “This priesthood of system and ritual has been tried and found wanting; henceforth the

prophets shall be My messengers." And, after Moses, the grand succession of the prophets dates from Samuel.

Comparing the deaths of Moses and Aaron, one writer says: "On the summit of Mount Hor has, for two thousand years, been shown the grave of Aaron. From that craggy top, he, like his younger brother, surveyed, though in a far more distant view, the outskirts of Palestine. He surveyed, too, in its fullest extent, the dreary mountains, barren platform, and cheerless valley, of the desert through which they had passed. It was a Pisgah, not of prospect, but of retrospect: it was, if we may venture so far to draw out its meaning, the appropriate end of the chief representative of the sacerdotal order of his nation, clinging to the past, looking back to Egypt, with no encouraging word for the future; the opposite of that wide and varied vista which opened before the first of the Prophets."<sup>1</sup> Or, as another writer says, in terms which tacitly encourage a similar comparison of the two orders: "The word of Jehovah to the Prophets was fraught with a universality, as well as an infinite depth of meaning, that made it a message for all peoples, the interpreter of History for all the ages, and, at the same time, the proclamation of the birth-time of a new spiritual world."<sup>2</sup>

There were false prophets in the old time, just as there were false priests; so that neither the one system nor the other is to be unduly praised or disparaged on account of the conduct of individual members. Nevertheless, the broad fact remains patent to the most cursory reader of Hebrew history, that, whereas the system of the priesthood

<sup>1</sup> Stanley, *The History of the Jewish Church*, vol. i. pp. 156, 157.

<sup>2</sup> M'Curdy, *History, Prophecy, and the Monuments*, vol. i. p. 340.

was ineffectual to give moral tone and spiritual life to the people, and was largely indeed the harbourage of vice, and the Dead Sea of a spurious religiousness that had neither inspiration heavenward nor a generous expansion towards the world; the institution of prophecy, on the other hand, was the salt of the nation, and the true altar-fire of the people's hopes.

At the time when Christ came, the priesthood was at its worst and deadest. He came in "the spirit of prophecy" (see Rev. xix. 10), and the priests were His persistent and malignant foes. Speaking to their party, He said, "Woe unto you! for ye build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. So ye are witnesses and consent unto the works of your fathers" (Luke xi. 47, 48). We need not wonder that, when the tragedy was consummated, "the chief priests," who, as Pilate said, had delivered Him over to this condemnation (John xviii. 35), stood "mocking" while the Prophet of prophets died (Matt. xxvii. 41). Well might Stephen charge them afterwards, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers" (Acts vii. 51, 52).

Is not the verdict of all subsequent history the same? Has not the priesthood, so styling itself, and cherishing the principles and traditions of its craft, been ever relentlessly opposed to the spirit of prophecy? Has it not waged war against freedom of thought, looking jealously on every quest of the truth? Has it respected the rights of con-

science? Has it cared so greatly for purity of heart and righteousness of life?—caring much more, in any case, that men should submit to its sway and obey its will. May any great and true revival of spiritual religion be traced to its influence? Or has not such revival been always the result of an earnest message to the consciences and hearts of men on the part of those who, even though nominally in the succession of the priesthood,—like Wycliffe, Savonarola, Luther, and Wesley,—were essentially men of prophetic spirit, doing their true work as prophets the better, the more they broke away from the priestly habit and rule?

We see, then, the alternative, presented even in the former days, to that system which, although taken temporarily into the plan of God's purposes, yet seems to have fulfilled its chief use in exhibiting its own unprofitableness: a spiritual covenant, and an interpreting prophecy. Shall we not claim our proper heritage, and rejoice in our rightful ancestry?

Ours is the heirship to a covenant which, from the beginning, has sought to accomplish itself as an immediately spiritual transaction between God and man. This is certainly its character as ratified in Christ. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put My laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people" (Heb. viii. 10). Rightly has this been regarded as one of the great classical passages declarative of the spiritual freedom of the religion of Christ Jesus. Nor is it possible to exaggerate the intensely personal nature of the relation-

ship here described. With all that believe, and severally, God enters into individual covenant: "For all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them" (viii. 11). This covenant may be, must be, avowed. "God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God" (xi. 16); nor may they be ashamed to acknowledge themselves His people. "The sacramental host of God's elect": this is the aspect they wear before the world. But the actual covenant, thus openly confessed, is between their own souls and God.

Who would not prize the privilege of interpreting this covenant to men? To make it in their behalf is impossible; but to help them, as God's messengers, by commending His truth and grace to their "obedience of faith"—such was ever the prerogative "of His holy prophets which have been since the world began." Nor may this prophetic gift be restricted to any channel of man's devising. The holy fire, though flashing along the line of kindred souls, must kindle direct from heaven. It scorns the monopoly of officialism, selecting its own anointed ones; and each for himself, hearing God's call, must answer, "Lord, here am I: send me."

## Chapter the Fifth

### FULFILLED REDEMPTION

*When we were children, [we] were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world; but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons.—*  
GAL. iv. 3-5.

*For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell.—*COL. i. 19.

WE have been considering hitherto the foretokening and foretelling of the accomplishment of God's purpose for the world's redemption. Why there should have been so long delay in the advent of the promised Redeemer we cannot tell, any more than we can account for the further delay in the consummation of His redeeming work. There may have been reasons affecting the larger interests of the universe, God's dealings with mankind being exemplary to other worlds; for these things "angels desire to look into" (1 Pet. i. 12). In any case, the slow fulfilment of God's promise was disciplinary for our world, as teaching a patient trust and a faithful waiting. Moreover, we must bear in mind that then, as now, the length of the delay would be partly attributable to man's own unbelief and sin.

But God was "not slack concerning His promise" (2 Pet. iii. 9); He did not repent Him of His purpose, nor fail of His covenant. When the time was fully come,



there was, for those that were willing to receive it, salvation full and free.

## I

The "fulness of the time," of which the apostle speaks, implies, for one thing, that now salvation was not afar off, but near.

That is a very pathetic as well as noble history, which is rehearsed concerning the elders of this world's pilgrimage, who lived and "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar" (Heb. xi. 13). The word was spoken—the word upon which God had caused them to hope; but there was neither present fulfilment, nor delimitation of the delay. Nevertheless they believed, with a faith that was not only the sure conviction of things not seen, but almost the substantive possession of things yet to come. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham—we behold them all as they step forward in succession towards the sunrise, looking wistfully to where the day should break, the calm stars above them, and the bending heavens; and yet one by one they falter and fail in the march of life, the east giving no sign of dawn. Thus the generations passed the centuries wore away; the pieties of the people alternated between errant superstition and the return to purer ways; the glamour of militant ambition dazzled the nation, or some great catastrophe dismayed them; priests measured off the dull present with their mechanical routine, and prophets sounded out their clarion call to a living duty and to the eager expectancy of coming good. Meanwhile, to all alike—to the more elect souls as well

as to the insensitive multitude—the promised redemption was yet afar.

The true attitude and expectation of the former time is well set forth in the picture of the aged Simeon in the temple. "This man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him." He had been as a sentry, keeping watch. The time had been weary, the night-hours passing slowly away. But now the day was breaking; the long-looked-for moment was at hand. He hears the dismissal; he sees the sign that his sentryship is ended. What had seemed afar off is nigh; the night that had gloomed so heavily makes haste to flee before the rising sun. The world's promise is at last accomplishing; the word of the Lord, in which the elders believing were justified, receives now its final fulfilment; the covenant blessing is bestowed, the shadows of type and symbol give place to the substance which they feebly signified, and prophecy merges into history. "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart, O Lord, in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke ii. 25-32).

In this "fulness of the time," again, the redemption which before was enigmatical is now made manifest.

The apostle Paul speaks with some awe of "the mystery of His will . . . the mystery of Christ . . . the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God" (Eph. i. 9, iii. 4, 9). The fact of the promise aforetime was indubitable, but its meaning was obscure. Only with an effort, however, can we so put ourselves into the posi-

tion of those to whom the promises were spoken as to recognise their enigmatical character; for we naturally read these promises in the light of their fulfilment, and expressions to us are full of significance which were as "sealed orders" to those that heard them. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen iii. 15). Such was the promise upon which the world's first hopes were made to rest. A promise? Yes, virtually; but in its express form a threatening to the tempter. The woman's posterity, though bruised in the conflict, should yet trample on the destroyer. But who of her offspring should win the victory, and when the victory should be won—all this was undetermined; and hardly was any implication given that such Son of Man should be also Son of God. Redemption presented a veiled face, and spoke in parables. Thus was it also through the whole course of the anterior age. The promises articulated themselves with growing distinctness; the blurred outline of the picture became more clearly defined, and its contents were filled in; the veil grew more and more transparent. Yet to the very last God spoke "unto the fathers by divers portions and in divers manners" (Heb. i. 1), each portion needing to be pieced together with a hundred others in order to explain itself and them, and every method, or manner, serving partly to conceal as well as to reveal.

There came at last, however, the full unveiling. God "hath spoken unto us in His Son . . . the effulgence of His glory" (Heb. i. 2, 3); and then no veil could hide the splendour, nor were the words of promise any longer hard

to be understood. "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth" (John i. 14). Thus was the full meaning of the promises made clearly manifest—

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,  
Or builds the house, or digs the grave;  
And those wild eyes that watch the wave  
In roarings round the coral reef.

The "fulness of the time" implies yet further that, whereas once there was an economy, spiritual indeed in its trend, yet materialistic in much of its method, an economy of "the rudiments of the world"; there is now the full enfranchisement of those that were "in bondage," the "adoption of sons" instead of the task-work of slaves.

Listen to the apostle's own account of the cult of his fathers. "Before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law hath been our tutor unto Christ. . . . So long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bondservant; but is under guardians and stewards until the term appointed of the father. So we were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world" (Gal. iii. 23, 24, iv. 1, 3). Thus does he argue with the Galatians, as desiring to disenchant them of that false glamour of "the law" which had bewitched their vision. This "law" was quite earthy and elementary, like the vain rules of the Gentiles. "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch"—such were "the rudiments of the world," mere materialisms of religion, mechanical restraints, to which both Jews and Gentiles were subject in the time past.

These things "have indeed a show of wisdom . . . but are not of any value" (see Col. ii. 20-23). The "law," at its very best, was only the "kindergarten" of religion, suitable in its way for the infantile world, but a discredit and disgrace to those that were of age; and in actual use it was too often the nursery of arrant follies, and even the shelter of gross misdeeds.

Moreover, as regards the Jewish law in its better aspect—the great "Ten Words," enunciating no evanescent observances, but principles that might never pass away—there was a tone, and there were accompaniments, that betokened the stern discipline of the school rather than the confidences and affections of the home. "A palpable and kindled fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that no word more should be spoken unto them" (Heb. xii. 18, 19)—so does another apostolic writer describe the tutorial economy, the bondage of the former time, the being "under the law." In this sense, "it was added because of transgressions"; for, just as an unruly school, or a rebellious country, needs the discipline of peremptory command, and of swift, stern penalty, so did Israel, stiff-necked and hard-hearted as the people were, require a code of laws that should divide, like a sharp, two-edged sword, between the evil and the good. There might conceivably have been a history of religion, adapted in its beginnings to the childhood of our race, and developing its meaning like the sweet unfolding of a flower, yet always free, gracious, and winsome, both before and after the attainment of full age; just as in some households the liberty

of the earlier days is only younger, not less real, than the freedom of full-grown life. But the obtrusive waywardness of our nature has spoilt the ideal, in the larger as well as in the smaller sphere; and, instead of an unbroken evolution of the good, there has been failure and degeneracy, necessitating the treatment of "the heir" as though he were "a bondservant."

Now, however, that the "Son" has come, "born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law," there is at once the subduing of our wilfulness, and the enfranchisement of our life. Receiving "the adoption of sons," we are not any longer under harsh command from without, but are moved by a sweet constraint within, even the constraint of filial love. "The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts," so that "we also rejoice in God" (Rom. v. 5, 11); and therefore "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" hath made us "free from the law of sin and of death" (viii. 2). Shall we then hark back to the bondage of the past? Shall we be of those who, being "of the works of the law, are under a curse" (Gal. iii. 10); or shall we not rather claim our part in the heritage of those who, being "of faith, are blessed with the faithful Abraham" (iii. 9)? "Mount Sinai . . . answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (iv. 25, 26).

## II

The redemption, then, being thus fully come, it was itself also fully equal to the satisfaction and supply of man's deepest desire and need. "For it was the good

pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell."

This truth is indeed involved in the former; for only a perfect salvation would be prepared with so much care, and held out so long time to the hope of mankind. But its perfection claims consideration on its own account, until we can say, in the language of the beloved disciple, "We beheld His glory: full of grace and truth!" These are the twin qualities in which all others are summed up, and which, interfused, are the equipment of the Saviour for His saving work.

He "dwelt among us . . . full of grace": so is the disciple struck with the infinite sufficiency of the Son's strong and tender sympathy. This is essentially the sympathy of the "Only-begotten"; of Him who is ever "in the bosom of the Father" (John i. 14, 18). For, whatever there is of tenderness in human love, all is derived from that source, and fed by that inspiration. Well may we give "thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love; in whom we have our redemption" (Col. i. 12-14): "according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved; in whom we have our redemption . . . according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. i. 5-8). For it is "the Beloved" who best can love; and that secret of inward sympathy, which He has learnt from everlasting in the blessed oneness of the Triune Life, He now whispers to His own; that strength of love, which has endured

unstricken through the ageless years, puts forth its gracious power to redeem.

Nevertheless, the divine is interpreted through the human, becomes incarnate in the human; so that the "fulness" of which we receive, the "grace for grace" (John i. 16), is the plenitude alike of human love and of the divine, the perfection of man's nature as meant to show forth God's likeness, and of God's as the original of man's. Nor is it human nature alone, but the experience of human life, and human character as perfected by such experience, that constitutes the well-spring of human sympathy through which the fulness of grace avails for our comfort and help. "Perfect through sufferings"—this is the title to Christ's captaincy of salvation (Heb. ii. 10); "in all things . . . made like unto His brethren" (ii. 17). Yes, frailty, privation, sorrow, temptation, death—by these things He won His fulness of sympathy; and to such a One, so tried, so victorious, so tender, we come for saving grace. "Thou that wert stripped of all things, and rejected; Thou whose very raiment was poor; Thou, the lowest and the least, the cast-out and the despised: Thou art exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour. Thou hast succour for all that are unbefriended; sympathy for all that are alone; suggestion and inspiration for all that are perplexed and blinded. There is eternal light and eternal warmth wherever Thou art."

But He who is "full of grace" is as manifestly "full of truth." In other words, for no cause, not even on the plea of grace, will He abate one single claim of righteousness; He will neither do, nor allow to be done, anything that is not true. There must be perfect allegiance to the



sacred ideals of life. He is "loyal to the royal" in Himself, and He expects unflinching loyalty to the regal claims of right in those that bear His name.

The ideal righteousness which the Son would make real in His followers—even as in Himself the ideal and the real are one—is both retrospective and prospective. Coming to those that were "under the law,"—as not only under its commands but beneath its condemnation,—"that He might redeem them which were under the law," He comes to set them free from that condemnation, to give them the status of righteousness even as regards "past years." Hence the holy bloodshedding which, more augustly than aught else in earth or heaven, attests the inviolable sanctity of right, at the same time that it frees the sinner from the stigma of his sin, and enables him to look both backward to the past, and upward to the face of heaven, asking, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. viii. 33, 34). By the same token, also, He asserts His royal law for the rule of their conduct in the days to come; nay, more, that law of love, with the irresistible urgency of the inspiration of the Cross, transforms the very character, and thereby effectually secures the right ordering of conduct. "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. v. 14); and so mighty is that love's constraint, that he who yields himself to its overmastering sovereignty is persuaded, because of its felt supremacy, that "neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 38, 39).

Thus does the true One make His people true, as surely as by His ineffable grace He draws near to them in their helplessness and sin, for the encouragement of their utter trust. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John i. 17)—came fully, as well as finally.<sup>1</sup>

If, then, the foretold redemption is at last fulfilled, being no longer afar off, enigmatical, and prepared for by the discipline of bondage, but intimately nigh, indubitably real, and such as befits the proper heritage of children of God's love; and if He who fulfils this redemption, being Himself the Elder Brother of every man, brings all the fulness of His grace and truth to the acceptance of each one's faith: where is the need, nay, where is the room, for any mediatorship of man? and where the possibility, without an affront to God's accomplished purposes, of any recurrence to the obsolete, the superseded methods of an age long past? "He came unto His own, and . . . as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John i. 11, 12). This adoption at once puts an end to all the imperfectness of the preparatory period,

<sup>1</sup> "Here the whole gospel rises before us: its preparation in the eternal Mind; its gifts, its elections, its issues, all preordained, until, in the fulness of time, Christ stands upon the earth; born to save; preaching to save; suffering and dying to save; rising to save; calling apostles, planting a Church, filling that Church with the Holy Ghost, to save; ascending to the holiest office of the priesthood to save, yea, to the uttermost, all 'that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them' (Heb. vii. 25)."—Jenkins, *Life and Christ*, p. 189.

being the final privilege to which God would bring His people; and in itself it is the guarantee of such close and constant relations between God and men, that anything savouring of the intrusion of human authority is a very real, though unintended, blasphemy—a “speaking ill,” in practice, of God’s most wondrous lovingkindness, by deeds that are virtually its denial. “Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal. iv. 6, 7). Of such sonship, immediacy of intercourse is the very essence; even as the true brotherhood of Jesus not only warrants, but claims, our freest faith, as well as our utmost loyalty of love.

On Thee we fling our burdening woe,  
O Love Divine, for ever dear;  
Content to suffer, while we know,  
Living and dying, Thou art near!

## Chapter the Sixth

### THE CHRISTIAN EVANGEL

*Good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people.*

LUKE ii. 10.

*The poor have good tidings preached to them.*—MATT. xi. 5.

THAT is a touchingly beautiful picture which is presented to us by the first evangelist, in his quotation from Isaiah, concerning the semi-Gentile population of the north to which the early ministry of Jesus brought its blessing. "The people," in the path of life's pilgrimage, were overtaken by the night, and, groping their way in vain, at last "sat in darkness," cowering and afraid; for the shades of night, to their terrified imagination, seemed haunted by all frightful things, and the place was as "the region and shadow of death." Thus they sat in the gloom and trembled, waiting for the dawn. What a wearisome vigil! Drearly the hours passed; nay, every minute was almost an hour. As the night-watches wore away, they lost all hope; it seemed as if the day would never come. But, after that darkest hour before the dawn, all at once "did light spring up," the sun mounting into the morning heavens, with royal magnificence making the shadows flee away, and by his wondrous wizardry transforming earth and sky. The things that before loomed ghostly through the night now showed as things of beauty; the weird

noises of the night had yielded to the songs of birds; the earth rejoiced and the heavens were radiant, for the day had come. Well might the erstwhile trembling pilgrims forget their fears, and go on their way with singing. "From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . And Jesus went about in all Galilee, preaching the 'Good News' of the kingdom." Such is the evangelist's interpretation of the picture (see Matt. iv. 12-25). Nor to them alone, so favoured, but to all who have sat in the darkness of their unbelief and sin, or have wandered hopelessly in the region and shadow of death, there comes, with the good tidings of Christ's salvation, the upspringing of a mighty hope, a wondrous and surpassing joy.

"Preaching the 'Good News' of the kingdom"; or, as the second evangelist expresses it, "preaching the 'Good News' of God" (Mark i. 14): such is the description of the Christian Evangel, of utmost significance as teaching us the full privilege of our spiritual enfranchisement in Christ Jesus.

## I

"The gospel of the kingdom" is interpreted by the fuller expression, "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. iv. 17, v. 3, 10, etc.).

There had been the empires of the world, so tyrannously oppressive: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Rome. There had been the rule of priest and scribe, a multiplied bondage of dull routine and lifeless formula. Even God's own holy law, breaking forth in awful majesty for the subdual of the people's sin, although truly from above, was terrible

as the thunder and lightning of the wrathful storm. This was indeed a lurid lighting up of man's darkness of transgression, yet it was no dawn of day. Now it is "Heaven" that shines upon the world: heaven, benign and beautiful; heaven, in its measureless depths and broad expanse; heaven, with its sweet, winsome, but all-pervading and victorious light, bringing in the world's true day. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand"—such were the good tidings that Jesus preached to all the people.

We have the fuller unfolding of the "Good News of the Kingdom" in our Lord's own interpretation of His ministerial work, as made known in the place "where He had been brought up" (Luke iv. 16-21):—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Nor does His further work present any contradiction to the spirit and purport of the earlier utterance; for we are told that His ministry irresistibly suggested another picture by the prophet whose words our Lord quoted at Nazareth (Matt. xii. 15-21):—"Behold, My Servant, whom I have chosen; My Beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall declare judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles hope."

He did, indeed, in His parables of the kingdom, speak warning as well as inviting words, that it might be known, concerning such as would not see the light, nor hearken to the words of grace, their hearts being hopelessly hardened to the love of God, that the kingdom of heaven was not their proper home (Matt. xiii. 13-15). And in the scathing "Woes" of the last days He more solemnly warned off from that kingdom the "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," not as being sinful, but as being impenitently sinful, and the more so as they were arrogantly self-righteous, their crowning sin being that they "shut the kingdom of heaven against men" (Matt. xxiii. 13). Thus did He the more emphatically make known that, according to His will, the kingdom should be opened freely to all that would enter; requiring, nay allowing of, no intermediation of man, but immediately available for all men—free as the air of heaven, free as the sunlight of God.

## II

"The gospel of God" is the same good tidings, though under a different aspect, and concerns the same kingdom of heaven, as otherwise called "the kingdom of God" (Luke iv. 43, vi. 20, etc.). For there can be no kingdom without a king; and as is the king, so is the kingdom.

God's kingdom, God's gospel—this was what Jesus preached. As at the last He exhorted the disciples, when their hearts were failing them for fear, to "believe in God" (John xiv. 1); so was this the continuous message of all His ministry. That they should "have faith in God" (Mark xi. 22) was the trend and application of His teaching, and the significance of His gracious deeds. His

parables and miracles alike bore this interpretation, and He lived out the same lesson before the eyes of the people day by day. They had believed, even as they were taught, that there was a God, the Holy One; yet He was little more than a Name to most, or an awful and hidden mystery. Now they were taught to believe *in God*, as meaning that, with the outgoing of all their heart's desire, they were to trust in God. He was to be no mere name, but a felt reality; no distant Being, full of dread, but a gracious Presence, making them "glad with joy" and "most blessed for ever."

At the outset of His ministry Jesus spoke to the people concerning their "Father," in language to us so familiar, but coming to them with somewhat of a shock of joy. Therefore did He insist upon the name, with multiplied repetition; and He put the word into their own lips, telling them to pray, saying "Our Father" (Matt. vi. 9). What, then, was the teaching of this name? Believe in God, "your Father," as the Giver of all "good things," and as giving freely "to them that ask Him" (vii. 7-12); as the God of your life, knowing your need, and watching over your welfare every day (vi. 19-34). Believe in "your Father," as inwardly and intimately near, and as recompensing the righteous with a reward that is unspeakably more precious than the praise of men—the reward of His own good pleasure and communicated love (vi. 1-18). Believe in "your Father's" free and full forgiveness—on this condition only, that you are so truly contrite as to cherish a forgiving spirit towards others, even towards the unjust and evil (vi. 14, 15). Believe, with a faith that shall transform you into God's



likeness, so that His light shall shine in your life, and you shall be "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (v. 16, 48). But, alternating with "your Father," there is the more immediately personal expression, "thy Father," as giving yet more force to the truth that, for all the blessings thus set forth, it is our prerogative to come, alone and individually, into the presence of the Most High, to ask for help, to commit all our interests to His care, to seek and find His favour and fellowship, and to attain His likeness.

Blending, however, with the exhortation to believe in God, there was the kindred appeal, "Believe in Me." Christ's teaching directly and expressly encouraged men to such belief; His works were an attestation that He was worthy of trust; and His character, so gracious and true, was ever saying, by its own intrinsic attraction, "Believe in Me." In that great invitation which perhaps more than any other has captivated the imagination of men, He besought the labouring and heavy-laden, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28); and in the words of promise which perhaps most of all have helped timid and trembling ones to respond to the invitation, He assured the people, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37).

Known to the disciples as "Master," and at the same time making Himself more fully known as "Friend" (John xiii. 13, xv. 13-15), while to the people generally He was Helper and Healer, He revealed Himself at last, by His death and resurrection, as the all-atoning Saviour and the ever-living Lord. So did the apostles make Him known, as crucified and risen, "a Prince and a Saviour"

(Acts v. 31); and so the "Good News of God" became more definitely the "Good News of His Son," as being the "gospel . . . unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 1, 9, 16). For this was the best and most precious gift of the Father's love (John iii. 16), even as to ourselves it is the way and means of sonship (xiv. 6-9).

Nor may there be any separation between the several parts and aspects of this one evangel. "If a man love Me," Jesus said, "My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23); even as He also said, "The Spirit of truth, whom I will send unto you from the Father, He shall bear witness of Me" (xv. 26). Both by His word and through His Spirit, He proclaims, to each and all, the kingdom of God's grace and of His own effectual redemption.

If the King of the kingdom, then, be such a One, and such His appeal to the lowliest to believe and be saved, well might the angels, that had looked so pitifully upon the sins and sorrows of the world, when telling of His advent, speak of the "great joy" that such tidings should kindle in the hearts of men. Without Christ, there is the fearsomeness of superstition, or the suffocating restraint of ecclesiastical tyranny, or the anguish of the sin-awakened soul. But Christ's gospel calls us "out of darkness into marvellous light," as being "a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. ii. 9). Moreover, in every aspect, this gospel of Jesus Christ makes its own immediate appeal to those that need it.

God's love in Christ, which is the light and glory of

the gospel, is too royal, too divine, to be dispensed and distributed by men. Heaven's sunshine may not be thus profanely manipulated; in its utter freedom, it repudiates and scorns such meddlesome management. The poor victim of men's meddling may indeed have been cast into some evil place, where the light shines not; or by his own folly he may have fallen into evil plight, and thus forfeited his true heritage. Yet the utmost that others can do, in his behalf, is to encourage him, brotherly-wise, to come forth from these factitious restraints, from this self-incurred misfortune, that he himself may see Christ's day.

Is the people's vision dim? Then, as the prophets of old were watchers for the dawn through the long preceding night, so may we watch, in behalf of others, for the full revealing of the glory that their unbelief has obscured from view. Yes, and we may bid them look; but they themselves must look and live.

Watching on the hills of faith,  
Listening what the Spirit saith  
Of the dim-seen light afar,  
Growing like a nearing star;

God's interpreter art thou  
To the waiting ones below,  
'Twixt them and its light midway  
Heralding the better day:—

Catching gleams of temple-spires,  
Hearing notes of angel-choirs,  
Where, as yet unseen of them,  
Comes the New Jerusalem;

Like the seer of Patmos, gazing  
On the glory downward blazing,  
Till upon earth's grateful sod  
Rests the City of our God!

## Chapter the Seventh

### REMISSION OF SINS

*Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them.*

JOHN XX. 23.

*Every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.*

ACTS X. 43.

FREELY as the kingdom of heaven vouchsafes its grace to all that will receive it, there is one of our Lord's sayings that may seem to contradict this liberty of faith. In that conversation with the disciples concerning His Messiahship, other parts of which will require consideration later, He said to Simon Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 19). The latter part of this saying is repeated shortly afterwards as having been spoken, not to Peter alone, but to all the disciples (xviii. 18). Similarly hard words were spoken by our Lord after His resurrection. "Jesus said to them again, Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John xx. 21-23). It is evident, how-

ever, that, for a right understanding of such words, we cannot properly ignore the practice and declarations of these same apostles afterwards: as of Peter, when he proclaimed to the household of Cornelius, that "every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts x. 43); and of John, affirming solemnly, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 9).

## I

"What must I do to be saved?" is the cry of the sin-stricken soul. And, as Paul replied to his Philippian jailor, so there comes to ourselves, in such a case, the glad message of the evangel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts xvi. 30, 31). For, whether we have regard to the purport of prophecy in the foregoing ages, or to the contents of the good tidings as consistently announced by Christ and His apostles afterwards, there can be no doubt whatever—apart from the two or three somewhat enigmatical utterances already referred to—that the Scriptures uniformly and clearly attest a great salvation as freely offered by God to man, and invite and urge men to be saved by faith. Of this salvation the initial process is the proffer of pardon to the penitent.

From the very midst of the solemnities of the law does the gospel thus speak forth: "It shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, and thou shalt call them to mind, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, that the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee. For the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, if thou turn unto the Lord thy

God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul" (Deut. xxx. 1-3, 9, 10). After the building of the temple God said, as though making it manifest that His dealings with the souls of men transcended all such limitations, "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin" (2 Chron. vii. 14); even as Hezekiah prayed afterwards, "The good Lord pardon every one that setteth his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary" (xxx. 18, 19). Similarly says Isaiah, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7). And by Jeremiah God speaks to the people, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God. . . . Return, ye backsliding children, I will heal your backslidings. . . . And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned against Me, and whereby they have transgressed against Me" (Jer. iii. 13, 22, xxxiii. 8). In like manner, by the mouth of Ezekiel, God says, "If the wicked turn from his sin . . . none of his sins that he hath committed shall be remembered against him: he shall surely live" (Ezek. xxxiii. 14, 16). And by Hosea, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and

receive us graciously; for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy. I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him" (Hosea xiv. 1-4). Well therefore might Israel be encouraged to pray, "For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great. . . . For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee" (Ps. xxv. 11, lxxxvi. 5). But, though such declarations are clear and strong enough, it is rather the whole attitude of God, as revealing Himself even under the law, which constrains us to say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul . . . who forgiveth all thine iniquities" (Ps. ciii. 2, 3); and this, as recognising the free gift of God's grace, vouchsafed, without intermediation of man, to each individual suppliant.

If, then, the elder covenant taught the doctrine of salvation by grace, through faith, we are prepared to find such teaching at its fullest and clearest in the New Testament. Christ's miracles of healing laid stress on the sole necessity of individual faith, and thus indicated the same condition as alone required for the higher work which they symbolised. "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," said the leper; and immediately there came the reply, "I will; be thou made clean" (Matt. viii. 2, 3). "Only say the word, and my servant shall be healed," besought the centurion; and, after the commendation of "so great faith," he received the assurance, "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee" (viii. 8, 10, 13). "If I do but touch His garment, I shall be made whole," said the woman, following timidly, yet with wondrous trust: "Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made

thee whole," were His words of swift response (ix. 20-22). "Have mercy on us, Thou Son of David," cried the blind men: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" he asked; and then, touching their eyes, said, "According to your faith be it done unto you" (ix. 27-29). In His directly spiritual dealings with the people, forgiveness and faith are immediately and exclusively connected together. "And behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven" (ix. 2). "And behold, a woman which was in the city, a sinner; and when she knew that He was sitting at meat in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster cruse of ointment, and standing behind at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. And Jesus said . . . Her sins, which are many, are forgiven. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And he said, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke vii. 36-50).

The express teaching of Jesus on this subject is unmistakable. "The Son of man must be lifted up, that whosoever believeth may have eternal life" (John iii. 14, 15); "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water" (iv. 10); "He that heareth My word, and believeth, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment" (v. 24); "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life" (vi. 47); "If any man thirst, let him come



unto Me, and drink" (vii. 37); "If ye abide in My word . . . ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (viii. 31, 32); "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me may not abide in the darkness" (xii. 46): such are some of His great sayings concerning salvation by faith.

When we turn to the teaching of the apostles, we find the self-same truth set forth, and now with all the advantage of the fulfilment of redemption in that great atoning death, which, as followed and attested by the resurrection, was their constant theme. The earliest utterance of Peter on the subject is his declaration at Pentecost, in the words of the prophet Joel, "that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts ii. 21); and, when he urges the people, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins" (ii. 38), he does mean indeed that with the inward faith of the heart there must be also an open acknowledgment and avowal of Jesus as their Lord, but that, this being the case, their faith shall find instant forgiveness. Not long afterwards Peter says again to the people, "Repent ye, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out" (iii. 19); and again later, concerning Jesus, "Him did God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins" (v. 31). The words already referred to, as spoken at Cæsarea, are a terse summary of the apostolic preaching in those early days: "Every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins." Similarly did the apostle Paul declare, at the beginning of his missionary work among

the Gentiles, "that through this Man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins; and by Him every one that believeth is justified" (xiii. 38, 39). The general result of this earlier work he summed up by saying, "that God . . . had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles" (xiv. 27).

In his Epistles, the apostle Paul says of the gospel, that "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. i. 16); and that "a righteousness of God hath been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe . . . being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by His blood, to show His righteousness . . . that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus" (iii. 21-26). "For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace" (iv. 16): such is the statement of the truth that is argued at length in his great classical treatise on the subject of the remission of sins, without one word to imply, or even to allow of, any suggestion of human inter-mediation in the transaction, other than that of making known the good news. "For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth. . . . For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be put to shame. . . . For the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a

preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? even as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!" Thus does the apostle argue (Rom. x. 4, 11-15) that the supreme duty, towards others, of those that have themselves believed, is to make known the good news of salvation; and that this salvation, as so made known, depends entirely on individual belief. We need but glance at his other epistles, for it is indisputable that on this great subject his teaching is one and the same. To one of the churches he says, "We preach Christ crucified . . . unto them that are called, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 23, 24); and again, "We are ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. v. 20)—his commission evidently ending with the entreaty in God's name. Writing to others, and expressly setting aside any supposed authority of Peter, or the rest of the apostles, he declares, "The gospel which was preached by me is not after man, neither did I receive it from man, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. i. 11, 12); and as it came to him, so does he make it known to others, in all its simplicity of appeal, though withal so earnestly, that, as he says, "I am in travail until Christ be formed in you" (iv. 19). He reminds the Ephesians, "By grace have ye been saved through faith" (Eph. ii. 8); the Philippians he exhorts to "stand fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. i. 27); the Colossians, "As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. ii. 6). Writing to the

Thessalonians, he thanks God "that, when ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also worketh in you that believe" (1 Thess. ii. 13); and he prays, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father which loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and stablish them in every good work and word" (2 Thess. ii. 16, 17). How unmistakable, again, is this language: "There is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in its own times—whereunto I was appointed a preacher" (1 Tim. ii. 5-7); and again, concerning the Scriptures, that they "are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. iii. 15); and that "God . . . in His own seasons manifested His word in the message, wherewith I was intrusted" (Tit. i. 2, 3). Thus does the apostle consistently represent himself as having authority, indeed, but only authority to announce, to preach, to make known the good tidings. He sets forth "Christ crucified," and beseeches men to receive "the reconciliation"; yet never does he so much as hint that either he or any other may intermeddle with men's faith, or with the communication of forgiveness. At times, when the suspicion of any such attempted intermeddling rouses him, he resents and repudiates, with utmost indignation, what he regards as a dishonour to Christ, and to the royal freedom of salvation.

The Epistle to the Hebrews falls to pieces as an argument, if this keystone be removed, that there is only one

“Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus” (Heb. iii. 1); “a great High Priest,” through whom alone we “draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy” (iv. 14, 16), seeing that “He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him” (vii. 25). Yes, “We have such a High Priest,” who “entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption” (viii. 1, ix. 12); therefore we are urged to “draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith” (x. 22). Of those that “had the rule” (in the ordering of church life and work), it is merely said, in regard to this matter of personal salvation, that they “spake unto you the word of God”; and the people are urged to “imitate their faith”—a faith in Him who abides, though all human helpers pass away: “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever” (xiii. 7, 8).

In the Epistle of James, though this deals chiefly with the works which are at once the fruit of faith and its proof, we nevertheless find it taken altogether for granted that faith itself is an entirely individual matter between man and God, although it is urged that faith is “reckoned for righteousness” only as it actually “makes for righteousness”; that is, it must be not so much an article of a creed, as the whole outgoing of the soul towards Christ for newness of life (Jas. ii. 14–26).

The Epistles of Peter are in agreement with his preaching, as already referred to, and show no trace of any assumption of authority. He delights to tell of Christ, “on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of

glory" (1 Pet. i. 8); "so that your faith and hope might be in God" (i. 21). "This," he says, "is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you" (i. 25). He puts himself on a level with his readers in this matter, inasmuch as they "have obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 1); "seeing that His divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue" (i. 3).

The Epistles of John are in perfect harmony with his great declaration of the terms of forgiveness, already quoted (1 John i. 9); for he tells us that, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins (ii. 1, 2). The bare suggestion of human mediatorship would blur, nay, would altogether destroy, the fair fame of that one sufficient resource of salvation for sinful man. "This is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (iii. 23): "Whosoever believeth is begotten of God"; "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth?" "He that hath the Son hath the life" (v. 1, 5, 12).

Lastly, in the Epistle of Jude, we still read of "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3); and his readers are exhorted to build themselves on their "most holy faith" (20). The concluding words may be taken as felicitously summing up the whole apostolic doctrine concerning salvation by faith in Christ alone: "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His

glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen."

## II

According to the consistent doctrine of Scripture concerning the remission of sins, as brought before us in this survey, the sinner comes face to face with God, through the mediation of Christ alone, and must either accept the free gift of God's grace, by faith alone, or abide under condemnation. With the exception of the two or three passages referred to at the outset, there is not only no shred of evidence that any human authority may intervene, but the whole tenor, as well as the express statements, of the Old Testament as well as the New, are directly to the contrary. It is thus that God's grace is magnified; it is thus also that man's own liberty is honoured.

Nevertheless, there are a few statements which, on the face of them, may seem to signify that remission of sins comes through the agency of man. This is the doctrine inculcated, on the strength of such statements, by the Roman Church, and others of that class; though the literal interpretation of the passages in question, especially by the former, is made to bear the whole stupendous structure of episcopal rule and pontifical supremacy, of which the dogma of priestly absolution is only a part. Thus the Archbishops of England, in their "Answer to the Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIII.," speak of "a Priest, who has what is called the power of the keys, and who

alone with full right dispenses the word and mysteries of God to the people, whether he remain a Presbyter or be advanced to higher duties as Bishop" (p. 27). In his "Encyclical Letter" of June 29, 1896, Leo XIII. says, "Jesus Christ appointed Peter to be the head of the Church: and He also determined that the authority instituted in perpetuity for the salvation of all should be inherited by his successors, in whom the same permanent authority of Peter himself should continue. . . . He invested him therefore with the needful authority. . . . 'The Son committed to Peter the office of spreading the knowledge of His Father and Himself over the whole world. He who increased the Church in all the earth, and proclaimed it to be stronger than the Heavens, gave to a mortal man all power in Heaven when He handed him the keys' (Chrysostom). In this same sense He says: 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth it shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven.' . . . 'No one can doubt: yea, it is known unto all ages, that St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith and the ground of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ. That is: the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to him who, up to the present time, lives and exercises judgment in the persons of his successors' (Philip, at the Council of Ephesus)."<sup>1</sup> It is held also that, though Peter was thus constituted the chief of the apostles, yet the others shared with him in his judicial authority. "Indeed, Holy Writ attests that the keys of the kingdom of heaven were

<sup>1</sup> *The Unity of the Church*, pp. 25-27, 32.



given to Peter alone, and that the promise of binding and loosening was granted to the apostles and to Peter"—the Roman Pontiff inheriting the primacy of Peter, and ordinary bishops the more limited powers of the rest of the apostles, by which they transmit to the priesthood the power to forgive sins, together with other mysterious prerogatives.<sup>1</sup> But it is needless to multiply quotations, as the general position of such interpreters is well known. Nor is it necessary, for those who accept the sole supremacy of Scripture, that this doctrine be tested historically, with the view of tracing the genesis and growth of so stupendous an assumption. The assumption having gained ascendancy, and tradition being taken for granted as of co-ordinate authority with Scripture, the doctrine of the priestly remission of sins is read into the few passages that seem calculated to bear it, in spite of the fact that, as we have seen, the whole teaching of Revelation is entirely to the contrary.

Reserving the significance, in this connection, of baptism and the Lord's Supper, which will fall for notice later, let us remind ourselves again that, when the practice of Peter and his fellow-apostles is examined, we find absolutely no trace of the attempted exercise of such supposed powers—which is surely strange enough, if these powers were really possessed; and furthermore that, in agreement with the rest of Scripture, their own writings, dealing expressly and at large with these topics, are entirely at variance with such a hypothesis. We find, moreover, one apostle, not of the twelve, who certainly falls not a whit behind the chiefest of them, expressly declaring that their

<sup>1</sup> *The Unity of the Church*, pp. 39, 40.

authority matters nothing to him for his apostleship (Gal. ii. 6); nor did he pretend to any such powers on his own account. So that, as a writer of unquestioned competency says, "There is indeed no trace in Scripture of a formal commission of authority for government from Christ Himself. Their commission was to be witnesses of Himself, and to bear that witness by preaching and by healing."<sup>1</sup>

Is it not, then, the manifest duty of a true exegesis to interpret these few obscurer sayings in harmony with the numberless statements on the subject about the meaning of which there can be no reasonable doubt, and especially in the light of the teaching and practice of those most concerned? Nor is such interpretation difficult. It is Christ alone who has "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers"; but, just as some large and splendid edifice, of imperial significance, built by the will of the nation, and thrown open by the nation, practically, to the use and enjoyment of the people, may be nominally "opened" by one upon whom that honour is conferred, whose silver or gold key is the symbol by which it is "declared open": so was Peter, for his discerning confession of our Lord's Messiahship, accorded the honour of being the first to make known that Messiahship to the multitude at Pentecost, and point them to the open door of entrance into the Messiah's kingdom. Nor has that open door ever since been closed, although many times the true freedom of access into the kingdom of God needs to be urged upon men, as it was urged by the apostle on that day. Again, when Peter declared, on that same occasion, that forgiveness was for the contrite, by faith in Christ crucified, and spoke warning

<sup>1</sup> Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 84.

words concerning the "crooked generation" that believed not, was he not virtually "loosing" and "binding," by thus announcing, authoritatively, the conditions of such "loosing" and "binding" as are actually in the power of God alone?<sup>1</sup>

Of the words spoken to the eleven after the resurrection we need say but little, seeing that the interpretation of the similar words addressed to Peter, and afterwards to the twelve, involves a corresponding interpretation in this case. "Peace be unto you," Jesus had said the first time; and "showed unto them His hands and His side"—this being surely the announcement of their own forgiveness, by virtue of that very death from which they had faithlessly turned away. Then again, "Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." The experience of reconciliation, through the atonement of His death, they were to make known for the benefit of other sinful ones. So saying, "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." In other words, only as their own hearts were full of the assurance of His forgiving love, could they so tell of that love to others, that these also

<sup>1</sup> "A writer of our own time has reminded us that, by the highest rank of the whole profession of the clergy—the Pontificate of Rome—the key of knowledge has been perhaps wielded less than by any other great institution in Christendom . . . that the almost uniform law by which the sins and superstitions of Christendom have been bound or loosed, has been that some one conscience or some few consciences, more enlightened or more Christlike than their fellows, have struck a new light or opened some new door into truth; and then the light has been caught up and the opening widened by the gradual advance of wisdom and knowledge."—Brown, *Apostolical Succession*, pp. 96, 97 (referring to Stanley, *Christian Institutions*, pp. 138, 139).

should be encouraged to believe with the full assurance of faith, and thus believing should experience, in all its felt reality, the blessedness of the same forgiving love; whereas, if they spoke with such inspiration, then none would be likely to abide unforgiven, except the impenitent, whose sins, in that case, God Himself would retain.

In all probability, other disciples than the apostles shared in this sacred commission, as afterwards in the enduement of power at Pentecost; even "the women," perhaps, being thus participants. (See Westcott, *in loc.*; and Hort, as above, pp. 32-34. So, likewise, Milligan and Moulton: "It will be observed that the Evangelist seems carefully to distinguish between 'the disciples' and 'the Twelve.' Hence we should naturally conclude that this manifestation of the Risen Lord was not limited to the apostles; and Luke xxiv. 33 shows that this conclusion is correct.") Therefore, to His believing people everywhere Christ gives the same sacred charge. It is true that none other can be the first to make known the good news, as was Peter; but we all may emulate his example, even as we all, having found the same Saviour, may be His witnesses.

'Tis worth living for this,  
To administer bliss  
And salvation in Jesus's name!

## Chapter the Eighth

### THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

*And they continued stedfastly . . . in fellowship.*—ACTS ii. 42.

*The fellowship of the Holy Ghost.*—2 COR. xiii. 14.

THE kingdom of heaven, of which it is the privilege of Christ's witnesses to make known the good news, and which Christ Himself has opened to all believers, must not be regarded negatively alone, as our refuge and rest from the condemnation and tyranny of sin; for we are reminded by the apostle on whom was conferred the honour of being the first to announce the "new and living way" of entrance "into the holy place," that we have been "called out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9). There is thus a positive heritage of the kingdom—its healing and quickening virtue, as of heaven's own sunshine—besides the emancipation from all hurt and horror of the outer darkness. This means an adoption into God's immediate favour and fellowship, which at once transforms our own nature, and brings us into the true fellowship of the saints. Thus do we become, in the best sense, a "people . . . the people of God" (ii. 10).

Our Lord, in His last prayer for His disciples, was regarding them, partly by anticipation, as gathered together into a people through faith in His name. The believers, at Pentecost and afterwards, were at once introduced into a

community, a fellowship of the faith. And the apostles, in all their subsequent work and teaching, are evidently dealing with those who, through believing in Jesus, "are of the household of the faith" (Gal. vi. 10). The terms that are used, and the whole tone of treatment of this subject, in the New Testament, seem simple enough, and in accord with all that we have hitherto understood of God's redeeming grace, and of the freedom of faith. But the long-standing dispute concerning the true character of the Church, as well as the pressure of current controversies, compels us to re-examine our own position, and to ask again what the Scriptures really teach concerning the new "fellowship" of believers, "the fellowship of the Spirit."

## I

For the most recent, and as being (on that side) the indisputably authoritative, pronouncement on the subject, we cannot do better than consult the "Encyclical" of Leo XIII. that has been already under notice. In his "endeavour to bring back to the *fold* . . . sheep that have strayed," he purposes "to describe . . . the lineaments of the Church," among which, he says, "the most worthy of our chief consideration is *Unity*." He declares that "Jesus Christ commanded His apostles and their successors to the end of time to teach and rule the nations. He ordered the nations to accept their teaching and obey their authority." This state of things, he says, implies visibility, and other sense-relations, and therefore "the Church is so often called . . . a *body*." "Scattered and separated members cannot possibly cohere with the head so as to make one

body. . . . The Church of Christ, therefore, is one and the same for ever: those who leave it depart from the will and command of Christ the Lord—leaving the path of salvation, they enter on that of perdition.” What is said respecting unanimity of opinion, which is taken as identical with “the unity of the faith,” will require attention later; but, for the conservation of this unanimity, we are told that “Christ instituted in the Church a *living, authoritative, and permanent Magisterium*,” and that “He willed and ordered, under the gravest penalties, that its teachings should be received as if they were His own.” Moreover, in accordance with the sense-relations of the Church, “the ordinary and chief means of obtaining grace are external: that is to say, the sacraments which are administered by men specially chosen for that purpose, by means of certain ordinances.” “The Church alone offers to the human race that religion—that state of absolute perfection—which He wished, as it were, to be *incorporated* in it.” “The power of performing and administering the divine mysteries, together with the authority of ruling and governing, was not bestowed by God on all Christians indiscriminately, but on certain chosen persons. For to the Apostles and their legitimate successors alone these words have reference: ‘Going into the whole world, preach the gospel. • Baptizing them. Do this in commemoration of Me. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.’” The Church, then, being essentially a visible organisation, with its all-important sacraments of the senses, when Christ “was about to withdraw His visible presence from the Church, it was necessary that He should appoint someone in His place, to have the charge of the Universal Church.” Thus

we are led up to the appointment of Peter, with the keys of authority, and all the prerogatives of judgment.<sup>1</sup>

What was Peter's actual authority, as the first to declare, to "the poor in spirit," the privilege of free entrance into the kingdom of heaven by faith in Jesus; and what were the sacred prerogatives of the apostles, as of all believers, in making known, from the fulness of their own experience of grace, that "in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12)—this we have already considered, in the light of the teaching and practice of Peter and his fellow-apostles, as agreeing with the whole course of Scripture teaching, and especially with the teaching of Jesus Christ. But we have now to inquire, in like manner, what is the true biblical doctrine of the Church, as contrasted with the dogma of Rome.

## II

We may surely obtain an insight into the real nature of this new society, first of all, from the pattern presented by Jesus and His disciples in the days of His earthly ministry. At the outset, He appears as a Master with a band of followers; nor does He cease at any time to be the Head of the household. More and more, however, does He become the Friend and Elder Brother of the little company, and it is the family character of that first society, therefore, which makes it exemplary for the Church in all ages. He exercises authority; but it is the authority of love. He lays down laws; but they are the laws of

<sup>1</sup> *The Unity of the Church*, pp. 3-25.



love. He does not say, "Do as I bid you, without asking why"; but He takes the disciples into His counsel and confidence, that they may be in sympathy with His will, and eager to fulfil His bidding. Love's uttermost sacrifice was the best guarantee of love's absolute supremacy (see John xv. 9-15).

These men whom He had chosen "out of the world," and for whom He gave His very life, would love their loving Lord; they would honour and revere, and be loyal to the wondrous Friend, whose confidential converse made their hearts burn within them, while they sat in the home, or walked by the way. Nevertheless, as the end drew near, and it was manifest that not yet were their unholy ambitions and unbrotherly jealousies subdued (John xiii. 14: compare with Luke xxii. 24), how He craved that the same spirit of holy love which actuated Himself towards them, and in a large measure themselves towards Him, might unite them each to each, and do away "the evil"—so essentially of the spirit of the world—which would otherwise eat out their strength, and kill their joy in God. "I pray for them: for those whom Thou hast given Me. These are in the world; and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them! Keep them in Thy name, that they may be one, even as we are. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them from the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on Me through their word: that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us . . . that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one" (John

xvii. 9–23). Is there any reasonable uncertainty as to the meaning of these words? That His people should be kept from the easily infecting blight of an evil spirit of self-seeking, jealousy, and strife, and should rather love one another as He loved them, yea, as He and the Father were one in the love of the Spirit—this was His yearning desire, His pleading prayer. But that He had in His mind unanimity of opinion on a hundred details of dogmatic belief, and uniformity of observance in worship, and that He thus declared His will that His people should be incorporated into one vast organisation, obeying the rules and traditions of men, and often of men whose spirit and practice were palpably the farthest from His own—for this there is not only no shred of evidence, but the conditions of the case altogether preclude the suggestion.<sup>1</sup>

What a picture of the true fellowship of Christ's people is presented by the scene that same evening in the upper room! Like other families at the Passover Feast, they were together in the place prepared; there had been the cleansing of the hot and dusty feet, the participation in the Paschal supper, with which, all still so homelike, the new "Lord's Supper" was interblended; and, after the lingering, farewell converse, they sang the parting hymn, and went forth to the vigil of Gethsemane. "Having loved His own, He loved them to the uttermost" (John xiii. 1); and it was that same love with which He thus yearned over them and blessed them—love stronger than death, so tenderly human, so graciously divine. Yes,

<sup>1</sup> "There is no trace in the New Testament that any ordinances on this subject were prescribed by the Lord."—Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 230.

they are indeed "His own"—His familiars, His very household, His intimates—and He would have them henceforth, when His visible presence is no longer with them, "abide" in His love, even as He will "abide" in their love: a mutual indwelling, He making His home with them, they finding their home in Him, and all thus "at home" with one another. For it was this that He meant when He said, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth: ye know Him; for He abideth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you. In that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. If a man love Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (xiv. 16–23). "Abide in Me, and I in you. Even as the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you: abide ye in My love. If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (xv. 4, 9, 10).

When we pass from this first experience of the fellowship of the Spirit, as already thrilling the disciples with a solemn joy, and from the forecast of its fuller realisation, to the time, so soon afterwards, when the promised gift was given, and believers were "added to them day by day" (Acts ii. 47), do we not find ourselves in the same atmosphere of holy love? There are bonds, but they are the bonds of love; there is a society, but a society whose very life is love; there is order, but there are no rigid restraints: in short, it is a household life that we behold,

of which love is the atmosphere, and hope the sunshine, and faith the perfect liberty. "Hence the true life of the Ecclesia consists for the most part in the hourly and daily converse and behaviour of all its members. The Ecclesia . . . is realised, as it were, in those monotonous homelinesses of daily living, rather than in administration or business, though it were business of the highest kind."<sup>1</sup> "They came together, and were of one heart and soul, because of the deep necessities of the new life created within them by the Spirit of God—a life drawn from the common fountain of life which is in Christ. They shared the same joy of forgiveness, the same dignity of sonship as children of God; they were heirs together of the same heavenly inheritance, and comrades side by side in the same great crusade for Christ. . . . The uniting force was vital, not institutional. Life came first, and, as elsewhere, organism grew out of life. Life and freedom, not officialism and ecclesiasticism, were the notes of the new brotherhood."<sup>2</sup> All that was asked of them was that they should yield their hearts fully to the Lord, and to one another for His sake; and that, serving Him in love, they should by love serve one another. That their fellowship, as well as their faith, should be made manifest, and that they should organise their resources for the fulfilment of their mission, was only reasonable and right. Therefore we find believers avowing and confessing their faith, initially in the symbolic act of baptism, and with frequent repetition in the sacred supper; and in this latter, as well as in their more fully developed association and intercourse, we see them making

<sup>1</sup> Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 228, 229.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, *Apostolical Succession*, p. 33.

known to all men that they are members one of another, at the same time that they gather inspiration, and take counsel, for the accomplishment of their manifold ministry among men. "They that received his word were baptized. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (ii. 41, 42).

Is it not the same condition of things that confronts us in the epistles to the various churches? Believers are banded together, they are more or less organised; but there is nothing to indicate that the method of organisation is rigid and compulsory, or that all Christians must belong, either locally or otherwise, to one specific community or intercommunion. Faith, love, and freedom—these were the true watchwords, for which apostles themselves had to contend against the gainsayers: faith making confession, and love making itself manifest, and both alike actuating and inspiring a concerted plan of action for the evangelisation of the world; but by "the law of the Spirit of life," which makes free, and not by any harsh imposition of outward command.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile it is the one true Church, consisting of all who truly believed, and who were thus in spiritual sympathy with one another, as well as with their Lord, that is spoken of in one notable passage as the Body of which Christ is the Head. "And He gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto

<sup>1</sup> "There is no trace . . . that any such ordinances were set up as permanently binding by the Twelve, or by St. Paul, or by the Ecclesia at large."—Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 230 (as above).

the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we . . . may grow up in all things into Him, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. iv. 11-16). For, whatever may be the various forms of church life and organisation, all more or less imperfect, and variously affected, for good or for evil, by the wisdom or unwisdom, the strength or weakness, of men, it is clearly Christ's will, as we have seen, that all who believe in Him should cherish mutual love, and, by the inspiration of one trust in a common Saviour, should be drawn ever nearer to Himself, and therefore nearer to one another.

The whole passage, however, is figurative, and "body" does not imply actual visibility of the one true Church, as such, any more than "Head" implies the visible manifestation of Christ in the world. Nor does the complete picture involve the "corporate" unity of the Church, as meaning one outward organisation, under the same human authority. But, just as the head and the body are one, so are believers spiritually one with Christ; and, just as the various parts and members of the body are one, so must Christians be spiritually in sympathy with one another, and therefore one in their affections and aspirations. "Scattered members" of the body do, indeed, no longer form a part of it; in like manner, they who are out of spiritual sympathy with Christ's people are no longer in the fellowship of the Spirit. Such real separation from the body and the Head, however, may exist in the case of those who are in close connection with a visible

church;<sup>1</sup> on the other hand, real spiritual union overleaps and ignores all outward separation. "Heresy" and "schism" are the disputatious and divisive spirit of quarrel and strife, whether as within the limits of one church, or as between the churches. They are, not difference of belief, or of outward communion, but the cavilling or captiousness of unbrotherly ill-will. The church that arrogantly unchurches others does, by that very act, come perilously near to unchurching itself; the Christian who cherishes an exclusive bigotry towards other Christians is in danger of thereby excluding himself from Christ.

"The Church," then, "is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22, 23), only in the sense in which Christ is the Head, namely, by spiritual influence, affinity, and inspiration. To press any such figure to the extent of compelling us to understand externality and visibility, such as an ordinary "body" implies, would be the assertion of a principle that would make almost any figure of speech impossible by which we might seek to illustrate spiritual realities. The one essential of the comparison, in this case, is unity of life, without regard to the distinction of physical and spiritual in the things compared. Just as the one physical life unifies our bodily

<sup>1</sup> "Like the first disciples, there came strifes among them as to who should be greatest; men were struggling for pre-eminence in the Church, for official place and power, 'assailing each other with words as with darts and spears, prelate inveighing against prelate, and people rising up against people.' Eusebius mourns over it all, and seems to anticipate the lament of Gregory Nazianzen at Constantinople a century later: 'Would to heaven,' cries he, 'there were no primacy, no eminence of place, no tyrannical precedence of rank; that we might be known by eminence of virtue alone!' 'Some that appeared to be our pastors . . . were inflamed against each other . . . anxious only to assert the government as a kind of sovereignty for themselves.'"—Brown, *Apostolical Succession*, p. 313.

frame, so the one spiritual life makes Christ and His people one; one in the fellowship of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> "For through Him we have our access in one Spirit unto the Father" (ii. 18), and thus are "no more strangers, but of the household of God" (ii. 19). Therefore does the apostle pray for this spiritual "family," that "the Father" would grant them to be "strengthened through His Spirit"; "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that ye may be strong . . . to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God" (iii. 14-21).<sup>2</sup> And he beseeches them, as "forbearing one another in love . . . to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (iv. 2, 3). For, as he reminds them once more, using still the same figure, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (iv. 4-6).

Unity of Spirit—this is essential; uniformity of outward and visible economy—this is not only unnecessary to the true unity, but may go far, where attempted, to make

<sup>1</sup> "The idea of the Church as found in the New Testament is truly sublime. It is that of a great spiritual community, composed of men from all lands and nationalities, and from all the ages of time. To accept either the Roman or Anglican organisation as being exclusively the body of Christ is to do the true Church of God a serious wrong, 'itself being so majestic.'"—Brown, *Apostolical Succession*, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> "As the ocean receives the fulness of the sea, as the wide plains and mountains receive the fulness of the mighty winds, and the heavens the fulness of the streaming sunlight, so the Church, in her length, breadth, depth, and height, the entire commonwealth of redeemed souls, is called to comprehend and receive into herself the greatness of the Christ."—Findlay, *The Church of Christ*, p. 60.



it impossible. Just as one family may be represented in the world by many kindred households, sprung from the same common source, and owning the bonds of the same brotherhood, yet living more or less apart, and united only in their family affection and fealty; so Christ's true people may, and should be, one in all spiritual sympathies and hopes, though worshipping and working severally as may best serve their own interests and the welfare of mankind. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord; and there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all" (1 Cor. xii. 4-6).

And, as the mystic aisles I pace,  
By aureoled workmen built,  
Lives ending at the Cross I trace  
Alike through grace and guilt.  
One prayer soars cleansed with martyr fire,  
One, choked with sinner's tears:  
In heaven both meet in one desire,  
And God one music hears.

## Chapter the Ninth

### THE GOOD CONFESSION

*Upon this rock I will build My Church.*—MATT. xvi. 18.

*With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*—ROM. x. 10.

To quote again from the "Encyclical" of Leo XIII., "Jesus Christ . . . made that remarkable promise to Peter and to no one else: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.' 'To Peter the Lord spoke: to *one* therefore, that He might establish unity upon one' (Pacianus). 'Without any prelude He mentions St. Peter's name and that of his father, and He does not wish him to be called any more Simon; claiming him for Himself, according to His divine authority He aptly names him Peter, from *petra* the rock, since upon him He was about to found His Church' (Cyril)."<sup>1</sup> This pronouncement is endorsed by Cardinal Vaughan, who says, "It is best to be perfectly frank and definite. The kernel of the question of the Reunion of Christendom consists in the admission of the Roman claim, that the Pope has received by divine right authority to teach and govern the whole Church. . . . All this may be briefly summed up in the famous axiom of St. Ambrose, 'Ubi Petrus ibi Ecclesia.'"<sup>2</sup> Such are the

<sup>1</sup> *The Unity of the Church*, pp. 25, 26.

<sup>2</sup> *The Way to the Reunion of Christendom*, pp. 7, 8.

most recent re-declarations of the well-known interpretation of our Lord's words, as addressed to Simon Peter, maintained from of old in support of the lofty claims of Rome. Other parts of that conversation we have already considered; and we must now inquire whether this saying, reasonably understood, does not entirely comport with all that we otherwise know of Christ's spiritual kingdom.

## I

Certain details of interpretation endorsed by Leo XIII. are quite untenable. It is implied that on this occasion Christ gave the name "Peter" to the confessing disciple, and knew him no more as "Simon." This is a twofold error. The name Cephas, or Peter, was assigned him in the first recorded interview (John i. 42), and yet he was called by the name Simon in the last (xxi. 15-17). On the night of the betrayal Jesus addresses him, alternately, by both names (Luke xxii. 31-34). It would seem, then, that, like other disciples, he bore both a personal and a descriptive name through all his discipleship with Jesus, and that only in after years did the latter prevail.

But we are concerned mainly with the meaning of the declaration, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." Jesus had been gradually preparing the disciples to discern His true Messiahship. He desired that this should be a spiritual conviction on their part, and not a mere assent to any assertion of His own. Therefore He did not force the truth upon them hastily, nor declare it dogmatically. It was to win its way to their hearts like the summer sunshine, and, when they had felt its gracious power, they would know that the sun must at

last have risen upon the world. In other words, His character and ministry were first to impress them, and then they would know that such a One could be none other than the Christ of God.

Now, however, they must surely be prepared to make confession. He asks them, first, what are the thoughts of the people concerning Him; and then, confronting them with the question which was to test the result of the preparatory process, "Who say ye that I am?" and receiving Peter's ready response, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," He commends the disciple warmly, as having arrived at this conclusion, not because of any sensational evidence, such as the Jews looked for, nor by the skill of human reasoning, but through an inward and spiritual illumination. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven." He had made confession, which was good; but the confession indicated true, spiritual faith, which was better. And this was the faith: that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

Such, then, was the truth which was to be afterwards believed by men, and to be believed even as Peter was already believing it; namely, by the free consent of the soul to the felt supremacy of a Saviour's love. What might not be accomplished, if men would but build on the immovable foundation of this rock-truth! Just where they were tarrying at the time, there were gigantic stones of ancient ruins, probably within sight as they conversed, and perhaps occasioning wonder (compare Mark xiii. 1); and there was also the live rock whence these stones had been

quarried, striking its roots down into the very world's foundations. Ah, here was a comparison! Simon's surname is "Petros," signifying a great rock-stone such as men would build into a temple; and he, with others of like faith, shall be built into God's spiritual temple. But it is on the "Petra," the very bed-rock of Christ's Messiahship, that the building must rest, if it is to be so secure that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The ruins which the disciples saw around them were evidence of the frailty of men's strongest work: strongholds are overthrown by foes, or they crumble with the lapse of time. The building, however, that is built on Christ shall not give way, though Hell pour forth from its gateway all its worst assault; nor shall the passing of the centuries witness its decay. Yes, "Thou art Petros," He said, pointing perhaps to one of the massive hewn stones as He spoke; "and upon this Petra I will build My Church," perhaps pointing again to the primal rock on which the vast stones had been laid. It might be that Peter was the first to believe definitely in the Messiahship of Jesus, and that he was therefore the first living stone to be built into the foundation of the spiritual temple. This, however, is not said, nor did it much matter; for such notions of precedence were what Jesus sought continually to discourage and repress. But, as the following words go on to assert (though with a change of figure), Peter should be the first to invite men publicly to such a faith as would make them also living stones in Christ's House.

Was not this plainly the disciple's own interpretation of the words, if we are to judge from the reference in his first epistle? "Unto whom coming, a living stone, ye

also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Pet. ii. 4, 5): so does he remind his readers that they must be built on Christ. It is true that we have not here the identical figure employed by Christ, as distinguishing the "Petros" and the "Petra"; partly, perhaps, on account of its personal reference, and partly also that, by the variation of figure, he may press into his service the words of the prophet concerning the "chief corner stone." Nevertheless, in either case the truth illustrated is the same, namely, that by faith in Christ alone can we be saved, and that only by resting on Christ can we become "builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22).

## II

We must remember, however, that, though it was Peter's faith which our Lord commended, and though it is this faith alone which incorporates us into Christ, yet it is only a "confessing" faith which saves men (Rom. x. 10), and that it was Peter's faith as so frankly confessed which won such warm approval.

On another occasion Jesus had said, "Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 32). To the apostles themselves He had said, "Ye also bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning" (John xv. 27); and again He said, concerning all His Christly work, "Ye are witnesses of these things" (Luke xxiv. 48). When they began their ministry, they well understood that it was essentially a testimony—a testimony that Jesus, the rejected of the Jews, was the

Christ of God. "We are witnesses of these things," said Peter and his fellow-apostles (Acts v. 32). The apostle Paul, who himself had confessed Jesus as Lord (ix. 5, 17, 29), insists upon such confession as one of the essentials of salvation:—"The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach: because, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 8-10). In another place he insists upon the same condition, "that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. ii. 11). And in writing to Timothy he says, "Thou didst confess the good confession" (1 Tim. vi. 12); and again, "Be not ashamed therefore of the testimony of our Lord" (2 Tim. i. 8). For himself he says, "I am not ashamed" (2 Tim. i. 12), even as he had said to the Romans concerning the same gospel (Rom. i. 16). Similarly does the apostle John declare, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God" (1 John iv. 15); and for "the testimony of Jesus" he himself suffered (Rev. i. 2, 9). Moreover, the apostle Paul adduces the supreme example of "Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed the good confession" (1 Tim. vi. 13).

This "confession" of Jesus Christ has a twofold significance. As an open and definite avowal of faith, it implies personal loyalty to Christ the Lord; and at the same time, by the power of example, as well as by more explicit claims on the attention of men, it serves to make

known His name. On the part of the disciples generally, it was the former that was more emphatic; on the part of the apostles, the latter, especially in its character as an explicit testimony. The different parts and aspects of such confession of Christ cannot be actually separated: it is one and the same act, varying in its manifestation according to circumstances, but in all cases essentially one and the same. The confession of the private disciple, while relating more immediately to personal experience and life, yet carried with it a recommendation to others of the same Jesus as Saviour and Lord, this testimony to become more direct as the case might permit; on the other hand, the confession of apostle or preacher, itself more directly an appeal to others, nevertheless implied the more personal testimony of individual faith and devotion.

In regard to one's own personal experience, this avowal of faith is of greatest consequence. For one thing, by its definite expression of itself, the faith which is thus avowed becomes more definite to the believer's own consciousness. Just as the utterance of thought, in speech or by writing, makes one more sure of one's own meaning; so does the open acknowledgment of our faith in Christ help to give our faith a securer hold on Christ. Again, as an avowal, it indicates loyalty to our Lord, the acknowledgment itself being the token that we are not ashamed. Thus, by a process of spiritual reaction, faith is made more aware to itself of its fuller character as fealty. We have received Christ into our hearts by faith; and now, by this open attestation, we respond the more earnestly to His claim upon the loyalty of all our life. Hence the emphatic insistence upon Christ's Lordship, in so many passages that



speak of the confession of His name. The believer must be one of Christ's saints; and by the outward and visible token his inward pledge of saintship is made more sure.

Very important, however, in its influence upon others is this public acknowledgment of trust and love. The sight of a soul renouncing its sin, and surrendering itself to the Saviour, will awaken in other hearts a desire for the same great salvation; and the manifestation of utter devotion to the Lord of light and love may well make onlookers emulous of the same loyalty of faith. For it is Christ who is thus set forth, in all the royalty of His saving grace, before the eyes of men; and, the truer the confession of His name, the more will He be magnified. That is to say, there is no question here of an exhibition of personal worth; there is no parade of personal piety. It is not what we are in ourselves, nor what we are to Christ, that we ask others to regard; but we do wish them to know that He is all in all to us, the sole and sufficient object of our trust and love. It is as though we said, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together" (Ps. xxxiv. 3). There is a whole diameter of distance, ethically speaking, between making a "profession" of religion, and truly confessing Christ.

What form such confession shall take is not specified in the various passages we have already had before our notice. Nor can we regard anything else as absolutely essential to salvation than the faith which is not ashamed, and which will therefore testify, according to opportunity, that Jesus Christ is both Saviour and Lord; a faith entirely loyal in itself, and loyal in its proper manifestation. But there are certain "signs" of faith that, for Christians

generally, will in part serve the purpose. In part: for the testimony of character and life, and the utterance of His worth, as determined by the desire that in all things "Christ shall be magnified" (Phil. i. 20)—this transcends entirely all testimony of signs and tokens. Nevertheless, these "tokens" have their value, which is not slight; and, although we must not exaggerate the same, yet neither may we treat it with disregard. They are mainly the simple, but significant, rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, which, because they serve as seals of the New Covenant, are well called sacraments. These sacraments have their own unique value for the faith of the participants, as the appointed pledges, for those who thus avowedly bind themselves to Christ, that Christ binds Himself to them. But they serve also as attestations. Baptism being already a recognised symbol of entrance into a new life, the believer, in this way, attests his entrance, by faith, into the newness of life which is in Christ—or, in the case of Christian families, the parents attest their desire to lead their children, by the way of faith, into the same new life of salvation. The Lord's Supper, again, attests the continual replenishment of our life by the faith which makes us evermore "partakers of Christ" (Heb. iii. 14); it bears witness to the fellowship of love into which believers are brought by their common faith in Him who "gave Himself up," for one, for all; and thus it continually signifies, as was said by the apostle, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. xi. 26).

We see, then, that, while only by faith can we be saved, yet the faith that saves us must be a faith that is true to

the Lord whom we trust, and so true, that, in any and every way possible, it will seek to fulfil His good pleasure and to magnify His name. Such faith must therefore, of necessity, be a confessing faith. It will be glad to assume His tokens, and thus to signify its solemn consent to the covenant which He has sealed with His own blood. But, much more, it will carry out and express this same covenant in every act and aspect of the new and holy life, thus witnessing evermore "the good confession," by the strength of Him who has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Moreover, inasmuch as those who are partakers of Christ by faith are thereby "members one of another," our true and full confession of Christ involves also an avowal of our participation in the fellowship of the Spirit. This is partly signified, as we have seen, by the Lord's Supper; but more fully by church life and work. That the true Church is itself a fellowship of the Spirit does not preclude, it rather prescribes, such actual embodiment in the world as may best serve the purpose of fostering and extending that fellowship among men.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose there must be mutual ministry, and organised resource and enterprise, these principles themselves being the same always, though their methods of application may greatly vary. Yet, for the sake of the brotherhood, and for the world's sake, there will be the need, in every case, of such avowal and confes-

<sup>1</sup> "When I look abroad and see the disintegrative agencies that are hard at work, the one thing I am anxious to do is to bring the great constructive, the great architectonic principles of our Christian faith into relation with life and action. . . . Then, when so inspired, working the work of time as in eternity, building on this earth a city, meant to be the great city of God, we shall hand on to a brightening future the nearer fulfilment of the promise which came to the ages through Jesus Christ our Lord."—Fairbairn, *Religion in History and in Modern Life*, pp. 270, 271.

sion of our fellowship in Christ as shall range us openly and heartily on the side of Christ's acknowledged people.

To return to the considerations which engaged us at the outset, we find, if the foregoing inquiry has led to right conclusions, that, just as it is the duty of the confessing Christian to magnify Christ alone, so it must surely be the duty of the confessing Church to confess Him only who is the Lord of the Church. Even as manifesting visibly the fellowship of the Spirit, it does not magnify those who are one in Christ, but Christ in whom they are one. And as to magnifying itself, the more or less imperfect embodiment of the true Communion of Saints; as to asserting its own prerogatives, and insisting upon its own claims—all this is far away from the spirit of the Christian faith. "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord," said the apostle (2 Cor. iv. 5); and so should the collective apostolate of Christians be able sincerely to say, "We preach not the Church, but Christ."

## Chapter the Tenth

### THE PREACHING OF JESUS CHRIST

*They ceased not . . . to preach Jesus as the Christ.*—ACTS v. 42.  
*Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach.*—1 COR. i. 17.

IN considering the character of the visible Church of Christ as a confessing Church, we have seen that anything like an assertion of itself is utterly inconsistent with the whole spirit of Christianity, which magnifies Christ alone. Nevertheless, this has been, and still is, the radical perversion of the Christian religion on the part of those who boast a "succession" from the apostles such as the apostles themselves would have been the last to countenance, and which is at the farthest remove from the true evangelical succession of promise, covenant, prophecy, and apostleship, as presented to us in the Scriptures.

Addressing the "Rulers and Nations of the World," under date June 20, 1894, Leo XIII. takes occasion to remind "Catholics, whom the progression of the Roman faith, while it renders them obedient to the Apostolic See, preserves in union with Jesus Christ," that they must "lay down for themselves as a supreme law, to yield obedience in all things to the teaching and authority of the Church, in no narrow or mistrustful spirit, but with their whole soul and all promptitude of will." He goes on to speak of the Church as "a society perfect in its kind," which is

therefore "endowed with a living power and efficacy . . . not derived from any external source, but . . . inherent in its very nature."<sup>1</sup> Again, in his "Encyclical," he speaks of "the essential beauty and comeliness of the Church," and endorses the saying of Augustine, "Let us love the Lord our God: let us love His Church: the Lord as our Father, the Church as our Mother."<sup>2</sup> But there is no need to multiply quotations, the exaltation of the Church being so familiarly characteristic of this whole school of thought, whether Roman or Anglican, that one wonders the palpable contrast to the apostolic principle, "We preach Christ" (1 Cor. i. 23), does not strike even those who, instead of preaching Christ solely and supremely, seem never weary of preaching "the Church."

Let it be remembered that the Church is only the aggregate of individual Christians; and that the visible Church consists of all who, spiritual or unspiritual, moral or immoral, are admitted to membership by man. Are we to exalt these? to do them reverence? But, regarding it at its best and purest, considering the Church as a spiritual fellowship, may we recognise any legitimacy in the claim, thus preferred in its behalf, to a reverence which amounts almost to deification? Whether for itself as a whole, or for themselves as its chief officers, when those who thus speak in the name of "the Church" demand the absolute veneration and obedience of men, they are practically asking for the idolatry of man by man, and by that attitude they virtually incur the reproach of self-idolatry.

The "kingdom of heaven," as entirely distinct from

<sup>1</sup> *The Reunion of Christendom*, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *The Unity of the Church*, pp. 3, 42.

“the Church,” is indeed divine, and may therefore be properly preached to men; for it means nothing other than the supremacy of the living God, and of His Christ, with all the gracious influence and inspiration of the Covenant of Redemption. In this kingdom the spiritual fellowship of believers has its home; and this same kingdom the churches have for their chief mission and ministry to proclaim to mankind.

## I

As contrasted with the preaching of Jesus Christ, which is the chief duty of the Church towards the outside world, as well as the summing up of its internal ministry, an infallible attestation of the details of doctrine has been strongly insisted upon by those who would magnify the Church as miraculously divine.

Speaking of “unity,” Leo XIII. says, “Agreement and union of minds is the necessary foundation of this perfect concord amongst men. . . . As there is one Lord and one baptism, so shall all Christians, without exception, have but one faith. And so the Apostle St. Paul not merely begs, but entreats and implores Christians to be all of the same mind, and to avoid difference of opinions (1 Cor. i. 10). . . . The heavenly doctrine of Christ, although for the most part committed to writing by divine inspiration, could not unite the minds of men if left to the human intellect alone. It would, for this very reason, be subject to various and contradictory interpretations. . . . From a variety of interpretations a variety of beliefs is necessarily begotten: hence come controversies, dissensions and wranglings such as have arisen in the past, even in the

first ages of the Church. . . . Besides Holy Writ it was absolutely necessary, to ensure this union of men's minds—to effect and preserve unity of ideas—that there should be another *principle*. . . . In regard to this external principle, therefore, we must inquire which one of all the means in His power Christ did actually adopt. For this purpose it is necessary to recall in thought the institution of Christianity. . . . Christ proves His own divinity and the divine origin of His mission by miracles; He teaches the multitudes heavenly doctrine by word of mouth; and He absolutely commands that the assent of faith should be given to His teaching, promising eternal rewards to those who believe and eternal punishment to those who do not (John x. 37, xv. 24, x. 38). . . . He requires the assent of the mind to all truths without exception. It was thus the duty of all who heard Jesus Christ, if they wished for eternal salvation, not merely to accept His doctrine as a whole, but to assent with their entire mind to all and every point of it, since it is unlawful to withhold faith from God even in regard to one single point. When about to ascend into Heaven He sends His Apostles in virtue of the same power by which He had been sent from the Father; and He charges them to spread abroad and propagate His teaching. 'All power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. Going therefore teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you' (Matt. xxviii. 18–20). So that those obeying the Apostles might be saved, and those disobeying should perish: 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned' (Mark xvi. 16). . . . It was no more allowable



to repudiate one iota of the Apostles' teaching than it was to reject any point of the doctrine of Christ Himself."<sup>1</sup> Then follows the argument that such an apostolic commission required apostolic infallibility, and that the transmitted commission involves a transmitted infallibility. Thus an infallible "Church"—infallible as speaking officially through its head, the Bishop of Rome—guarantees the whole doctrine of Christianity, to which there is required assent, in every point, under penalty of everlasting damnation, if in one jot or tittle should be ventured any variance of opinion. "The Church, founded on these principles and mindful of her office, has done nothing with greater zeal and endeavour than she has displayed in guarding the integrity of the faith. Hence she regarded as rebels and expelled from the ranks of her children all who held beliefs on any point of doctrine different from her own."<sup>2</sup>

Exactly. And hence the glorious history of chains and dungeons, racks and thumbscrews, faggot and flame; of Holy Inquisition and St. Bartholomew's days—all in order to fulfil our Lord's last prayer, that His people might be "one"! So has the principle of loving, trustful unity, which He was insistently desirous should be maintained among His disciples, been perverted to something the very opposite of His intention; and almost every conceivable torture which man can inflict on man has been justified, because of the necessity, forsooth, of maintaining the unity of the faith! Could there be a more signal instance of the revenge of history for the abuse of truth?

There is little evidence that the "Church" has been particularly zealous to purge itself of all suspicion of

<sup>1</sup> *The Unity of the Church*, pp. 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

immoral life among its members; nor has any consuming zeal been manifest for the fostering of an earnest spiritual devotion, inspired by immediate personal communion with God through Christ. But the maintenance of absolute unanimity of opinion has been the one thing needful; and this has been (hypothetically) secured by such convulsions, rendings, and destructions as constitute a grimly Satanic caricature of the unity of love.

Apart from all positive persecution of which the "Church" has been guilty, until it is deeply dyed with the blood of souls,—persecution never yet disowned, and indeed utterly undisownable, because of the professed immutability of the Church,—there is nothing which brings more shame to the reader of its annals, than the accounts of those wrangling Councils of former days, when, for dissension on points of doctrinal detail, disputation has waxed almost as rough as the contests of the prize-ring, and execrations and anathemas have rent the air. And all this, to enforce the fulfilment of our Lord's desire, that His followers should be "one." Surely His teaching could not be more palpably contradicted and profaned.

For there is not the slightest trace of a desire on Christ's part that His disciples should agree in the complete acceptance of an elaborate scheme of doctrine. "Belief," or "faith," is indeed the watchword ever on His lips. But, if the whole course of our inquiry hitherto has not been in vain, and if the simple interpretation of the gospels does not mislead, there was nothing other intended by the faith to which Jesus so graciously allured the people, than a personal trust in His redeeming love. This might consist—and ever has consisted, ever will consist—with

much variety of opinion; on the other hand, there may be an enforced expression of assent to details of doctrine often little understood, without any sincere acceptance of Christ as the immediate Saviour of the soul. "*Believe Me*," said Christ, as He pleaded with the people, evidently meaning, from the very comparison employed, "Trust yourselves to Me; follow Me"—even as the sheep follow the shepherd, and as men trust a chosen leader and defender (John x. 25-28, 37, 38). Well might it be said of those who yielded their hearts to such gracious persuasions, that they "believed *on Him* there" (x. 42), so essentially personal and experimental was the faith He sought for, and having so little to do with intellectual assent to an elaborate system of doctrine. Similarly, when He gave the great commission to His disciples, it was that they should "make disciples" of the people to whom they proclaimed the good news; that is, disciples such as they themselves were, trusting and loving the Lord Christ. Not a system of doctrine, but a message of salvation, an announcement of a Saviour, Christ the Lord—this was the evangel. Such an evangel claims the acceptance of the heart, if it is to do men any good; but, if they receive it not, they abide in their sin, and are doubly condemned—condemned because of the sin from which they will not be saved, and condemned for their ungrateful rejection of One who so rightly claims their trust and love (see John iii. 16-21). Those who "believe,"—that is, who heartily accept the Saviour, —and are willing to make such loyal "confession" of His name as baptism implies, are saved: saved into the favour and love of God, and into the sure hope of the life everlasting. They gladly learn the things "commanded,"

namely, to love one another (see John xv. 17), and thus "fulfil all righteousness" (Rom. xiii. 10). So is the life of heaven begun on earth.

That this was the preaching of Jesus Christ, as the apostles understood it, and not the minute inculcation of doctrinal beliefs, is the concurrent testimony of the apostolic history and of the apostles' writings. "They ceased not . . . to preach Jesus as the Christ" (Acts v. 42): so is their work described, as filling up the moments of those earlier days. And the apostle Paul makes similar declaration: "Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ" (Col. i. 28)—that is, making known the personal Saviour of men, and alike warning them off from the temptations that would imperil their faith, and building up their life in the fulfilment of His holy love. Nor do we require any further guarantee for our faith than the true testimony of the apostles, as perpetuated in the writings of the New Testament, and confirmed by the spiritual experience of the multitudes who have found salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

## II

Another chief function of the Church, as acting through

<sup>1</sup> "The apostles, we have seen, were essentially personal witnesses of the Lord and His Resurrection, bearing witness by acts of beneficent power and by word, the preaching of the kingdom."—Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 230. "The truth is, if we seek from the Scriptures the *essentia* of the apostolic office, the special and distinctive function of the apostles, differentiating them from all other preachers of the gospel, then and since, we shall find that it consisted in bearing witness to the facts of our Lord's life, and especially of His death and resurrection."—Brown, *Apostolical Succession*, p. 49.

its officials and head, has been magnified, along with the supposed infallible promulgation of doctrine, namely, the celebration of the sacraments, and especially the constant re-offering of Christ in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

The recent dispute concerning the validity of Anglican Orders has turned on the use of such a formula in ordination as is declared by Rome to be essential to the conferring of this priestly power. "All know that the Sacraments of the New Law, as sensible and efficient signs of invisible grace, ought both to signify the grace which they effect, and effect the grace which they signify. Although the signification ought to be found in the whole essential rite—that is to say, in the matter and form—it still pertains chiefly to the form; since the matter is a part which is not determined by itself, but which is determined by the form. And this appears still more clearly in the Sacrament of Orders, the matter of which, in so far as We have to consider it in this case, is the imposition of hands, which indeed by itself signifies nothing definite, and is equally used for several Orders and for Confirmation. But the words which until recently were commonly held by Anglicans to constitute the proper form of priestly Ordination—namely, '*Receive the Holy Ghost,*' certainly do not in the least definitely express the Sacred Order of Priesthood, or its grace and power, which is chiefly the power '*of consecrating and of offering the true Body and Blood of the Lord*' (Council of Trent) in that sacrifice which is no '*bare commemoration of the Sacrifice offered on the Cross*' (*ibid.*)."<sup>1</sup> It is stated further, in "Vindication" of this pronouncement, that "A priest is one who offers sacrifice;

<sup>1</sup> Leo XIII., *Letter Apostolic concerning Anglican Orders*, pp. 9, 10.

and, as is the sacrifice, so is the priest. . . . He may have other powers annexed to his office, as the power of forgiving sins; and he may be likewise charged with the duty of preaching the Word of God and exercising pastoral care over the people. But these other powers and duties are superadded and consequent. They are very suitably annexed to the priesthood, but they are not of its essence. The priest would not have been less a priest if they had been withheld from him, nor is he more a priest because our Lord has thought fit to communicate them to him. He is a priest solely because he has the office and power of effecting the Real Objective Presence on the altar of the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and thereby offering Him up in sacrifice.”<sup>1</sup> And again, “As priesthood consists mainly in this gift of power to offer sacrifice, we shall expect to find that the words used by our Lord signify this gift and the conferring of this power. Nor are we disappointed. Our Lord did actually ordain His apostles by giving them power to offer the Sacrifice of the New Law. ‘Do this,’ He said, ‘in remembrance of Me.’ The ordination carried with it by implication the authority to do all that is contained in the idea of the Christian priesthood—to baptize, to bless, to absolve, to excommunicate. But these powers were not at this time given explicitly. One power alone is mentioned, and that one, as we should have expected, is the only one which is really essential to the idea of the priesthood—the power to offer sacrifice. ‘Do this in remembrance of Me.’”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Vindication of the Bull “Apostolicæ Curæ,”* by the Cardinal Archbishop and Bishops of Westminster, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Stapylton Barnes, *No Sacrifice—No Priest*, p. 5.

Here we have the position clearly defined. The Christian Ministry is essentially a priesthood, by the transmission of priestly powers from Christ through the apostles to their successors; and this priestly power is the power to effectuate the Real Presence of Christ on the altar, and thus to offer in sacrifice His Body and Blood. But, in the first place, the words in which our Lord is assumed to have conferred upon His apostles the power to transubstantiate bread and wine into His Body and Blood, for the sacrifice of the Mass, would certainly never bear that meaning to the unsophisticated mind; indeed, a most violent exegesis is required to wrest from them such a significance. In giving the bread to be eaten, He said, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matt. xxvi. 26); or, "Take ye: this is My body" (Mark xiv. 22); or, as Luke has it, "This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me" (Luke xxii. 19). Now, looking at these three accounts together, can we understand Luke's report of Christ's words as signifying anything else than that, what He had already told them to do, namely to eat the bread, they were to do thenceforth in His memory? As to the supposed conferring of power to transform the bread into His own body,—stupendous and intrinsically contradictory miracle,—there is no hint warranting such an interpretation as among the possibilities of the case. Moreover, the implied assumption that He had already, in this instance, changed the bread and wine into His own body and blood, is equally inadmissible; for He could not, without a miracle yet more self-contradictory, effect such a change, while as yet standing before them in the full embodiment of His earthly manhood. How simple the

meaning of the incident, and how agreeable to that earlier teaching at Capernaum, in which the same figure was employed, when understood of the institution of a memorial, the bread and wine of the supper being taken as tokens of a love that gave itself to death for our sakes, and our participation in the same implying that by faith we "become partakers of Christ" (Heb. iii. 14). For had He not said, as though foreseeing the abuse of after years, "The flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John vi. 63)? No, the body and blood of Christ, if we could partake of them, would be powerless to convey spiritual grace. "It is the spirit that quickeneth"; and we must appropriate *Christ*,—Christ's sympathy, Christ's salvation,—if either our faith, or the sacraments of faith, are to do us any good.

Indeed, so much is said concerning the finished Sacrifice of the Cross, that it would seem there could be no room for even imagining any suggestion of the myriad-fold re-sacrifice of Christ day by day. "Christ . . . through His own blood entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. ix. 11, 12); "once at the end of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (ix. 26); "having been once offered" (ix. 28); "when He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (x. 12): "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (x. 14).

Surely, if the Lord's Supper were actually a Mass, the one supreme act of the Church, and if the Christian Ministry were really a Priesthood, entitled and empowered to offer "oftentimes" the same Sacrifice, such powers, and



such a performance, would almost absorb the attention of the New Testament writers; it would be felt to be so all-important that everything else would fall into a subordinate place. On the contrary, very little mention is made of the Lord's Supper, the almost incidental references of the Acts and Epistles showing that it was a recognised institution, but giving no suggestion of mysterious powers or awful prerogatives.<sup>1</sup> The faith that saves, and the life of faith—this is the one theme. Thus, baptism is an open confession of faith; the eucharist is a manifestation of faith. Neither sacrament, in itself, has value, but only for what it signifies. That is, there is no objective efficacy, no intrinsic power to communicate grace; but, alike for one's self and for others, the spiritual significance, though often made more real and vivid by the outward act, is the one all-important element. In this case, we can understand why the preaching of the word of life, by which men believe, is represented as the one end and aim of the apostolic ministry. Paul gloried that, not the ministration of a sacrament, however valid and helpful, was his peculiar calling; but "to preach" (1 Cor. i. 17). Sacraments men could live without, if such were their deprivation; but they must believe, or die. And, as "belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. x. 17),

<sup>1</sup> "This may be said to represent on the negative side the absolutely new and distinctive character of the religion of Christ. It stood among the ancient faiths as a strange and extraordinary thing—a priestless religion, without the symbols, sacrifices, ceremonies, officials, hitherto, save by prophetic Hebraism, held to be the religious all in all. And it so stood, because its God did not need to be propitiated, but was propitious, supplying the only priest and sacrifice equal to His honour and the sins and wants of man."—Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 49 (see also *Catholicism: Roman and Anglican*, p. 169).

this word must be preached, and the "glad tidings" made to sound forth through all the world.

The apostolic work, and the work therefore of a ministry in the true "succession," according to the assumption which shelters its illegitimacy under the hypothesis of a "tradition" co-ordinate in authority with Scripture, is to enunciate infallibly, in every detail, the Catholic faith, which if a man do not keep he shall without doubt perish everlastingly; and also to offer on the altar emblems which, by the authorised repetition of mystic phrase, are converted into the Propitiation of the Cross. In other words, "Salvation by Formula" may be said, not unfairly, to represent this theory—salvation by assent to the measured formulæ of creeds, and salvation by the efficacy of a formula of consecration. We must choose once more, in these days, between such a principle, again asserting itself loftily in our midst, and the "Salvation by Faith" which it was the glory of apostles to make known, and which has meant, to the millions of lowly, contrite ones that have hearkened to the good news, the light of an everlasting day, and the power of an endless life.

## Chapter the Eleventh

### SPIRITUAL HEREDITY

*For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect.—ROM. iv. 14.*

*And such confidence have we through Christ to Godward. . . . Who made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit.—2 COR. iii. 4, 6.*

“HISTORICAL continuity” is the boast of those who claim to trace back their ecclesiastical genealogy, through the touch of man, and the repetition of phrase and formula, until, as they think, they reach the apostolic ordainment of these things, and farther back still the authority of Christ. There is, perhaps, a certain value in the jealousy with which this supposed “succession” has been guarded and maintained, although not of the sort its custodians imagine. As for the transmission of “grace” by this means, that is a sheer impossibility; for it would mean that the most spiritual influence in the universe is communicated along a channel of such conditions and guarantees as may not unjustly be termed a conduit of ecclesiastical materialism. If the grace of God comes this way, and is therefore itself much more materialistic than the best influences of human life, the Bible must be read backwards, and the most familiar and fundamental principles of Christianity will be turned upside down. Moreover, to suppose that God’s grace—so spiritually pure—not only chooses for its channel

a crassly materialistic passage along the course of the ages, but has often had to filter its way through very sinks of uttermost depravity, according to the indisputably attested villainies of priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes, in the dark ages, and the dark places, of the Church's history : is not this more than an impossibility, and worse than an absurdity ? for does it not come very near to blasphemy against the Holy One ?

Nevertheless, there is a value of another kind in the jealously guarded continuity of these external arrangements of the Church. Just as God overruled the foolish bibliolatry of the scribes, so that their exaggerated estimate of the "letter" of Scripture, absorbing the attention in such wise as to make them blind to its spiritual significance, is yet the pledge to later ages that there was at least no tampering with the sacred books in their day ; so has the sadly grotesque attempt to establish an unbroken succession of church forms and ordinations through nearly two millenniums been made to testify to mankind that Christianity is not of yesterday, but that a religion whose mere husk has been so long cherished with almost idolatrous devotion does itself really date back to the time when it claims to have entered the world for its regeneration.

Such particular form of historical testimony, however, although of considerable interest and value in its way, is by no means essential to the establishment of the objective historical continuity of the religion of Christ. Nor is this, as we have seen, the essential significance of the dogma of "succession," in the eyes of the upholders of that hypothesis. They hold that the succession itself, alike of grace and of the power to confer grace, is of paramount concern ; and

we must ask what is the true doctrine of spiritual heredity, of which the aforementioned dogma is the pitiful burlesque.

## I

A true doctrine of spiritual heredity looks backward, along the course of the years of history; although not along any restricted and tortuous channel of mere word-repetitions and manual contact. But, foremost and supremely, it looks upward.

The "Church" has had its ceaseless vicissitudes, fluctuating diversely in its fortunes with the flux of years; but the "kingdom of heaven" abides in serene benignity, and with perennial power to bless, being never behind us, but always bending over us from above. "Look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 28)—so He said once, and so He says always. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17), said Jesus at the beginning; "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke x. 9), was the continual message of His ministry, whether by His own lips, or through His messengers; and, in His last foretokening of the times to come, He still said, "The kingdom of God is nigh" (Luke xxi. 31). That was the burden of His preaching. The "Church" He never proclaimed, but always the "kingdom"; and the Church itself must proclaim the kingdom, if it would be true to its mission.

What was the real nature of this kingdom, as Christ made it known, we have already seen. It fulfilled in itself the significance of the promises made to men aforetime, and attested the righteousness of God as available to the men of faith. It held in its treasury those realities of

which the law, priesthood, and sacrifices of the elder days were but the shadows. It was a kingdom sealed for man's own possession by solemn covenant, and the prophecies that went before did but partially foretell the blessedness assured to all that would enter in. The kingdom itself, with its saving grace, had opened its doors to the contrite in every place and age; but, with the fulfilment of redemption in Jesus Christ, its message became clearer and sweeter, and the reality seemed more near. The evangel told men of their heritage; through the one Name was made known the remission of sins; the humblest believing ones were ushered into a spiritual fellowship that made the nobilities of earth seem common things; the joy of the heritage, and loyalty to the Lord of the kingdom, constrained to an individual, and to a concurrent, confession of His name; and the one consummate privilege of the Church, in itself and by its ministers, was to make known the kingdom, and to preach the atoning and risen King.

Those that hearken to the good tidings, and believe truly in the Lord of life and love, are therefore well called "rich in faith," as being "heirs of the kingdom which He promised to them that love Him" (Jas. ii. 5). For so was it said by the King Himself to the "little flock," "Fear not: it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). So, too, shall it be said to them at the last, when all the glory of the kingdom, as well as its grace and blessing, is to be made manifest, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xxv. 34). But the kingdom of heaven is already possessed by faith, and itself possesses those who welcome it to their

hearts. "The kingdom of God is within you," He said, rebuking the desire for its premature display (Luke xvii. 20, 21); and the erstwhile bondsmen of "the power of darkness" are spoken of as even now "translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Col. i. 13). The inheritors of this spiritual kingdom may well be spoken of as "born anew," for they now live and move and have their being in a new and better world; or, as possibly the expression should be understood, "born from above" (John iii. 7), for it is the grace of a kingdom which is essentially an upper and diviner realm that alone effectuates the change from darkness to light, from death to life.

This, then, is our heritage. Whether for ourselves individually we would have experience of the things of God, or would make known to others the riches of His grace, in either case we inherit, first and chiefly, from above; nor need we any other contact, if only heaven touches us and God moves our souls. "Heirs of God" (Rom. viii. 17), as possessing Him who is evermore the same, we have a present and abiding joy. By immediate communication, He yields us all the riches of His love; and, by immediate commission, He sends us forth to declare His grace to men.

## II

The doctrine of spiritual heredity, however, looks backward as well as upward. That is to say, though our immediate inspiration is from heaven, yet the kindling of such inspiration may often be effected by spiritual contact with others; these in their turn owing the lighting of the heavenly flame to a like contagion of spiritual ardour,

whether for personal experience or for holy service. In any case, the truth itself by which we live is made known to us by the testimony of man.

The true "evangelical succession" implies that the one evangel does its illuminating work from age to age. We have already seen that the condition of salvation—not arbitrarily determined, but necessary in the nature of the case—is not the intellectual acceptance of a scheme of formulated doctrine, but rather our personal acceptance of a Saviour. In other words, saving faith is nothing other than individual trust—a trust of the heart which may consist with very various beliefs in matters of detail, but which does mean, in every instance, an earnest surrender of the soul to Christ. The "gospel" which was to be proclaimed to men was the "good news" of such a Saviour, as having come into the world, and lived and died for men, and as being now exalted to the right hand of God, "to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." What is required, therefore, to make saving faith possible to men, is not an infallibly guaranteed accuracy of a whole body of dogmatic truth, but a reasonable attestation of the advent and ministry, the death and resurrection, of the Saviour. The testimony of Christianity to Christ is manifold, and this is not the occasion for presenting it afresh, or for weighing its claims. It has been subjected to every conceivable test that the opposition of men could devise, but only asserts itself the more vigorously and successfully after each renewed assault. With regard to the testimony of the evangelic writings, it is generally allowed that no witness of history has ever been made to answer for itself under anything like so prolonged and severe a



cross-examination; nor has the scrutiny of all the centuries been able to detect any flaw which leaves the evidence of our faith open to suspicion.

During His personal ministry, Christ was His own gospel. It was not so necessary to proclaim a Saviour, for His gracious Saviourhood proclaimed itself. His works, His life, His words, His character—by all these He said, to the sinful and the sorrowing, “Believe in Me.” But when the redemption was fulfilled, and He was gone from the midst of men, then it was needful that the “Good News” should be made known—made known and certified. During the interval between His resurrection and ascension, “He interpreted” to His disciples “in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke xxiv. 27). Then said He, “Ye are witnesses of these things” (xxiv. 46–48). Thus did He testify concerning Himself; His apostles were to testify in His Name.

In the early days of the apostolic preaching, the facts of redemption, as made known by Him, and guaranteed by such testimony as the most malignant of His enemies were powerless to impeach, were the same simple but all-significant facts of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension; and the gift of the Spirit to all that believed made these facts no longer matters of mere external credence, but of inmost and incontestable experience. “Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God unto you . . . Him ye did slay: whom God raised up” (Acts ii. 22–24); “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified” (ii. 36); “Ye killed the Prince of life; whom God raised from the dead: whereof we are witnesses”

(iii. 14, 15); "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (iv. 12). Such was the witness of the first days. And the later apostolic testimony was the same. "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. ii. 2); "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins . . . and that He hath been raised on the third day" (xv. 3, 4). The apostles descant on this theme, and urge their message, and apply the principles of the gospel. But the gospel itself was this simple news concerning Christ, which the veriest child can believe, and which suffices amply for the oldest saint.

This one gospel of salvation has come down to us through the ages, certified by all reasonable tests of history, and victorious over unreasonable assaults; the message is in almost every one's possession, actually or potentially; and, putting it to the test of faith, we enter, so far, into the "succession" of those who have received and believed the same truth.

The evangelical succession thus implying a common heritage of saving truth, the abiding possession by the Church of a common gospel; that same gospel does a two-fold work, as inspiring one spiritual experience among the members of the true Christian Church, and one spiritual enthusiasm in the Christian Ministry.

According to the opposite theory, assent to a creed would seem to be the all in all of faith: there must be submission to the external authority of truth, and those that enforce the authority will then guarantee the salvation of such as

submit. But, according to the gospel, there must be, above all, the earnest consent of the soul to the immediate and inward influence of the Saviour. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. iii. 17)—that is the watchword of the gospel, as appealing to the experience of men. The apostolic teaching all tends to this result. Take away spiritual experience from the epistles, and their substance, their life, their aroma is gone. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. i. 16); "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (viii. 35); "My speech and my preaching were in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. ii. 4); "Whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him . . . God revealed through the Spirit" (ii. 9, 10); "Who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. i. 3)—such is the doctrine of experience which saturates the writings of the apostle Paul. "On whom . . . believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. i. 8, 9); "Grace to you, and peace, be multiplied, in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet. i. 2); "That ye may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3); "God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (iv. 12)—so do the beloved disciple and his comrade teach the people concerning the same inward experience of the things of God. In every case, indeed, the apostles insist on the necessity of an outward experience as corresponding with the inner life, of a life of righteousness as the outcome of the experience of faith;

and in this, as well as in setting forth the privilege of fellowship with God through Christ, they do but follow the teaching of their Lord.

The "common salvation" thus resulting from an earnest acceptance of "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), as an experience which we therefore share with all the saints in all the ages, and which comes to us, not solely from the effectual working of the truth, but often by the influence of soul on soul—this makes us, individually, to participate in the true "succession" of the saints of God, as actuated by the same faith, and also as more consciously "imitators of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. vi. 12).

Nor is the case essentially different with regard to those who are more directly and exclusively called "to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts xx. 24). All Christians, indeed, are called to bear witness; but, ordinarily, to bear witness by their life, by the Christian spirit with which they fulfil their work in the world, and more directly as they have opportunity. With others, however, the call is an exclusive one, in the sense that to preach Christ is the one thing they are to live for; and even if, as in the case of the apostle Paul, they engage in other work, yet this must be only as aiding the one mission of their life, and making it more effectual. In their case, the universal ministry of the Church comes to its most definite expression and application; though, for that very reason, it is the Church's Ministry as exercised through them, and in obedience, as is believed, to the higher call of God. Therefore, what is said here concern-

ing the "succession" of the Christian Ministry is true of all Christians, though it is more definitely realised in the case of those who more exclusively fulfil that ministry, as a testimony of the gospel.

What, then, is the true, the spiritual lineage of the Christian Ministry? Is it not that those who are immediately called of God to such a work and service, and in whose hearts there burns the heavenly fire, are for that very reason in line, spiritually, with all who aforesaid have been called with the same calling, and in whose hearts the same fire has burned? A tactual succession can but ensure, at the utmost, a pedigree of routine: for a spiritual ministry the succession must be spiritual. Is it not so in the whole realm of mind? Who is the true successor of a great laureate? His son? or whatever successor may be appointed to wear the wreath? Is it not, rather, he who has the kindred poet's soul? Moreover, just as the succession, in this case, is sometimes doubly real, the kindred genius being awakened to its exercise, and becoming aware of itself, by the example and influence of the earlier singer; so is it often true of the prophet of the gospel, that not only is he akin, because of the prophetic fire, to the prophets of elder days, but the fire that glowed in them has flashed its contagion to his own spirit.

How infinitely more glorious, in every way, this lineage of the spirit, than the boasted genealogy of what is, after all, of the flesh, fleshly! That belongs obviously, in spite of all protestations, to the realm of sense; this to the realm of faith. That is supposed to secure ecclesiastical

correctness; this opens a way to the generous, the ennobling, the saving inspirations of the kingdom of God. That goes by rules of man's devising, and it is as though by aid of an inch-measure men were marking out their way to heaven; this summons us to trust God Himself for His own inbringing of the people to their heavenly rest, as when a ship ventures forth on the boundless sea, spreading its sails to the free winds, and guiding its course by the stars.

There is "Church history" in connection with this lineage; but it is the history of faith, and of the faithful. There is continuity; but it is the continuity of truth, of life, of holy love. There is indeed a "succession," and this succession is in the right sense apostolical; for it is the succession of the gospel which the apostles received and preached, of a living experience such as they themselves both learned and taught, and of a personal testimony to which they were faithful unto death.

"The present age . . . finds its surest apology for the Christian faith, not only in the appeal which that faith still makes to the soul, but also in the fact that God has never left Himself without a witness in the past, that there has been an unbroken succession of the sons of God in every generation, who have borne witness to the power of His Word, handing on to those who follow the torch of light and truth amid the surrounding darkness, until humanity should step forth into the fuller day."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. V. G. Allen, *Christian Institutions*, p. 4.

## Chapter the Twelfth

### ETERNAL LIFE

*This is life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God.—*  
JOHN xvii. 3.

*We know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. My little children, guard yourselves from idols.—*1 JOHN v. 20, 21.

THE doctrine of eternal life may be held crudely, as setting forth a future of infinite duration in contrast with the temporary duration of the present. Or, more scripturally, eternal life may be viewed as a present and abiding actuality, realised in its perfection in God Himself, existing in real, though not absolute, perfection in the case of the holy angels and of saints made perfect, and attainable very really, though in less degree, by all who come to the knowledge of the true God by faith in Jesus Christ. According to this view, the eternal world is not so much future as transcendent in its character, that is, it transcends the limits of our natural life in the world, as being spiritual and divine. But it nevertheless affects, it interpenetrates, and is meant to transfigure the natural order of things, in proportion as by faith we rise to the height of our calling, and dwell together "in the heavenly places" (Eph. ii. 6).

This doctrine has very important bearings on the subject which has been under consideration. For, according

to its affinity with eternal realities, is our religion itself the most reasonable and real; and, by the law of spiritual continuity, our present life in God is truest as it leads by necessary approach to the life made perfect.

## I

While the quality and character of the eternal world, as encompassing and pervading this present life, is essentially one and the same, it yet presents itself under various aspects. As the home and source of life's true ideals, it is well worthy of consideration.

Life itself has worth just in proportion to its ideals. Not what is, but what ought to be, and what therefore may be, is the properly determining factor of our existence; for, as beings endowed with the initiative of free choice, and with the prerogative of progress, we may aspire to the highest, and aspiring may attain. If we are content with life's hard facts, making the best of its prosaic presentments, then life will be dull enough; but, if we aspire to its possibilities, and are willing to learn its true poetry, then life will be glorified with such light as "never was, on sea or land." Yielding to considerations of expediency, as suggested by the sense-relations of the natural world, and by the cunning calculations of the understanding, we may soon be brought morally to the lowest level, even when our wits are at their keenest. But, attracted by the holy beauty of the right, the good, the true, and surrendering with eager gladness to the imperative of the ideal, we shall become, even in this world, but "little lower than the angels" (Heb. ii. 7).

These were the "things in the heavens," of which the



picture-lessons of the law were but "copies" (Heb. ix. 23); the true ideals, of which "the pattern" was shown to Moses "in the mount" (viii. 5). This was "the heavenly vision" that burned and glowed before the dazzled soul of Saul of Tarsus, and to which, in all the years of the true life and ministry that followed, he was "not disobedient" (Acts xxvi. 19). Life's true ideals were all, at their best and fullest, with the Son of man, to whom "the heaven" was always open, and "the angels of God ascending and descending" (John i. 51). To Him these things were so real, that in them He lived and moved and had His being; and, even while He trod the earth, He might well speak of Himself as "the Son of man which is in heaven" (iii. 13). "The Second Man is of heaven"; and we, believing in Him, shall "bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. xv. 47, 49). To have thus become "partakers of a heavenly calling" (Heb. iii. 1), and to have "tasted of the heavenly gift" (vi. 4)—this is one part of the meaning of eternal life.

But the ideals of life are not separate entities, inherently self-existent, and independently supreme. They are God's ideals for the world; they are the rayings forth of the beauty of the divine mind; they are the augustly gracious behests of the divine will. Hence God is called "the true God," as One whose nature is ideally true; and only as we "know Him," and "are in Him," have we any sure hold on life's true, rich, beauteous meaning. "Duty" has well been called, "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God": stern, indeed, towards wilful desire and wanton evil-doing. Beautiful and blessed, however, beyond all telling, is its aspect towards the humble and the faithful;

for then it shows as the gracious allurements of God's own beauty of holiness, and to those that yield to its charms, and follow its leading, it gives its own exceeding great reward.

Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear  
 The Godhead's most benignant grace;  
 Nor know we anything so fair  
 As is the smile upon thy face:  
 Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,  
 And fragrance in thy footing treads;  
 Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong;  
 And the most ancient Heavens, through Thee, are fresh  
 and strong.

To "know God," however, is much more than to recognise and obey the divine ideals of life, as such; for it means a consciously personal relation to God, of so intimate a faith, of so affectionately loyal a regard, that with Him we have perpetual converse, and His love, "so pure and changeless," is our own possession. No better, tenderer word was used by our Lord concerning His disciples, as expressing their proper relation to Himself thenceforth, than the word which lingered so lovingly on His lips in the last farewell: "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John xv. 4); "abide ye in My love" (xv. 9); and again, "We will come . . . and make our abode with you" (xiv. 23). This same thought lingered sweetly with the beloved disciple: "Ye shall abide in the Son, and in the Father" (1 John ii. 24); "abide in Him" (ii. 28); "God abideth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (iv. 12); "we abide in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit" (iv. 13); "he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him" (iv. 16). So do his last

words remind us that, knowing Him, "we are in Him" (v. 20). There is an element of meaning in this word to be more particularly considered directly; yet the central, spiritual significance of this favourite expression, if we may so style it, is that of being "at home": we are at home in God, God is at home in us. Can existence offer anything higher, deeper, richer?

But there is still another consideration that must not be passed over; for, though the everlasting duration of their existence, as sentiently most happy, could not in itself constitute the eternal life of God's people, that life involving, as we have seen, contents of inexhaustible spiritual wealth, yet the very quality and worth of such a life imply its continuance for ever. By reason of its own nature, as related to ideals that can never bend to decay, and to a love of God which quenches the very suspicion and fear of death, this life will "abide"; and God's people, abiding in Him, will therefore abide "for ever" (1 John ii. 17).

Such is the significance of Christ's answer to the Sadducees: "Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. xxii. 31, 32). In other words, it would be impossible for God, having taken men into trustful and loving relation to Himself, to cast them off into nothingness; He would not bind them to His heart, only to let them perish. Some men, indeed, seem willing enough to renounce their hope of immortality, as but a delusive dream; and even some Christians make almost a parade of their indifference as to whether they

shall live for evermore. But, if our own personality be of such slight account to us, that we care not whether it shall continue; and if our interests in kindred, friends, and the great company of humankind, are so slight, that it matters not to us should they be destined to perish with ourselves: yet, with any true love for God, we ought not to be able to endure the thought that our fellowship with Him will cease to be, even as this is the farthest from His own desire and will. "Thou shouldest call, and I would answer Thee; Thou wouldest have a desire to the work of Thine hands" (Job xiv. 15): thus, long ago, faith grasped the assurance that God's love and longing for His people are the pledge of their immortal life. "If I go, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 3): so did the Lord convey the same assurance to those whom, having loved, He loved unto the end, and for ever. Endless existence is the indefeasible prerogative of human souls, as made for God; and this truth, so fundamental to our nature, lies underneath the whole of God's revelation to men, as too indubitable to be argued, or even expressly averred. Nor, though sin has inverted the quality of human life, in almost every regard, does it destroy our essential being; working death, as we have seen, it yet never works, and never can work, annihilation to those that were made in God's likeness. Just as the faculties of the soul remain, though misused and poisoned; so does the soul's essential permanence of being continue unimpaired, though now fraught with the dread prospect of abiding retribution. Thus for God's people, and for them alone, there is "life for evermore."

The world of divine, and therefore abiding, realities is about us always; it interpenetrates our life; it becomes our possession by faith. To have fellowship with these, and with God in whom they inhere, is to have eternal life. "Lay hold on the life eternal . . . the life which is life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 12, 19), said the apostle to his young son in the faith. "We have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life" (1 John i. 2), said the beloved disciple, who knew already, when he lay on Jesus's breast, that he could "never perish." Again he said, "This is the promise which He promised us, even the life eternal" (ii. 25): "this life is in His Son" (v. 11). And again, "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (v. 13). But he told the secret of it all, when he said, "Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (i. 3).

Even this life, however, so perfect of its kind, and intrinsically abiding, has its everlasting consummation yet in store for those who are dwellers upon earth. For, inasmuch as the spiritual is intended to transfigure and perfect the natural, and all human interests are under the rule and sway of a redemption that casts nothing aside as valueless, therefore, not until the world which God once pronounced "very good" is for ever rid of the fatal blight which has drawn over it, and has come out of the shadow of defilement and destruction into the light of God; and not until our human history is purged of its false ambitions and sinister aims—not till then, when nature and human society, with all their possibilities, are sharers in the great redemption, shall eternal life have come to its completion.

Thus there shines before our view the glory of the latter days, and we shall surely do well to be always "looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. iii. 12).

"As the Christian man lives in this power of the world to come, and, having fought 'the beautiful fight' (2 Tim. iv. 7), goes hence to receive the crown of righteousness, so likewise the Christian faith holds up for human society the ethical hope of new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. iii. 13). The times and the seasons knoweth no man but the Father; there are greater works of faith to be accomplished, and there are before us in our generation unfinished ethical tasks of providence; but the Christian social idea, in some sure world-age to come, is to be realised in the completion of the Messianic kingdom which the Christ shall give up to the Father. The kingly procession of the divine decrees moves on toward the thrones on which the Christian seer saw those unto whom judgment is given; the prophetic vision of the Christian centuries is uplifted to the city of God, the holy city, which shall come down out of heaven from God having the glory of God."<sup>1</sup>

## II

To this doctrine of the eternal life, then, we must make our final appeal, in testing the merits, respectively, of the assumed "Apostolical Succession," with its imposing organisation, its "carnal ordinances," and its claim to the absolute keeping of conscience and belief, on the one hand; and, on the other, of the true "Evangelical Succession,"

<sup>1</sup> Newman Smyth, *Christian Ethics*, p. 494.

with its access to the resources of a "kingdom not of this world," with its spiritual privileges, and its glorying in the freedom wherewith Christ makes His people free. In the one, there are the traditions of men, as claiming to supplement, and therefore practically to override, the witness of the Word of God; in the other, there is the supremacy of Scripture, as commending its own meaning to the lowly mind, and interpreting its own message to the believing heart. The one is a dispensation of the letter that killeth; the other, of the spirit that giveth life.

Which of these is in true accord with the laws and principles of the eternal life? The question needs only to be asked, to be answered. There is one guiding principle which we have seen as prevailing through all the history of God's Kingdom in the world, and of His process of redeeming grace: the principle of spirituality. Intimately connected with this principle is the sovereign law of liberty. God Himself has acted freely; He invites men to a like freedom. On His part there has been the freedom of grace; on their part He encourages and honours the freedom of faith. All this is in close agreement with the doctrine of eternal life; nay, in this we see the eternal life already manifesting itself to men. But, just as the ritual law of the former time was so impracticable, as being of "the rudiments of the world," that it "made nothing perfect," and was therefore disannulled "because of its weakness and unprofitableness" (Heb. vii. 18, 19); so does the legalism of more modern times—which, as imitating, whether consciously or unconsciously, the discarded experiment of the past, is but the shade of a "shadow" (viii. 5)—offer nothing that can help to the attainment of

the "life indeed," nothing that leads on naturally and fitly towards the great spiritual consummation of the last days.

The glorious ideals of the kingdom of heaven, and the blessedness of immediate fellowship with God—how wholly becoming, that these spiritual and eternal realities should be promised to men freely, and pledged in sacred covenant; that faith in a redeeming grace which brings back the alienated blessing should be counted for righteousness; that prophecy should tell beforehand of the fulfilment of the promised redemption, and that, when fulfilled, it should be made known by glad evangel to the whole world; that sins should be remitted freely to all who accept the good news; that believers in so great a love divine should be attracted together into a great spiritual fellowship, the one true Church of God; that such blessings should be openly and frankly confessed before men; and that the one only Name by which this great salvation comes to the world should be preached always and everywhere! But eternal life, which is thus the ever-present reality to a spiritual faith, must be a far-away dream to those who linger among the ordinances of men. This is to tarry amid the "idols," the vain semblances, pertaining to a religion that is bound in the bonds of sense; when, worshipping in spirit, we might see God face to face, and live.

Let the Church, then, claim its heritage; let it rise to the height of its true ancestry; let it live in spiritual kinship with the eternal, which, though seeming far, is yet so near. By faith, let us learn to be free—free in our access to all "spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. i. 3); even as "the Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother" (Gal. iv. 26).



## Conclusion

THE signs of the times portend that the great issue of to-day is between a vigorously recrudescing religious legalism and a true evangelical liberty. "Submission to the Authority of the Church," and "Freedom by Faith in Christ": these are the two watchwords of the contest. Surely every earnest English Christian should know beneath which banner he elects to fight.

The Roman Church is becoming at once more assertive, and more subtle and specious in the presentation of its claims, as knowing those with whom it has to deal. The Anglican Church is largely dominated by the same spirit, although just now there are indications of an awakening to the true significance of the position on the part of many who have hitherto seemed indifferent under the guise of tolerance. Meanwhile, there is a banding together, in the brotherhood of a "Holy Alliance" of the faith, on the part of such as, unfettered by the restrictions of State establishment, and forgetting lesser differences under the attraction of spiritual kinship, are showing the world one front under the name, so happily chosen, of the "Free Churches." A still closer union—that is, of federal association and action—would warrant the adoption of the yet happier designation, "The Free Church."

For, in the light of the foregoing argument, it will be clear that the true freedom of the Church of Christ, so intimately involved in its spiritual character, is not the negative freedom of immunity from State control alone, but the positive liberty of those whom, by His great salvation, Christ makes free. Spiritual liberty is our birthright, as children of the promise, as heirs of the covenant, as justified by faith, and as freely confessing the one great Name. We have received freely of the fulness of the great salvation; we have entered into the free, spiritual fellowship of the living Church that grows up into Christ; and Him we preach, by constraint indeed, but the sweet constraint of love. Freely we have received; freely we would give. Ours is the essential significance of the elder law, for the One Priest, and His All-Sufficient Sacrifice, avail in our behalf for evermore. From burning prophet-souls we catch the contagion of the holy fire; the witnessing of the apostles we would fain fulfil; we march in line with the martyrs, and with all the blessed dead; we are in the spiritual succession of the saints, as free in Christ and seeking to make others free. And we have "one hope" of our calling: already we have felt "the powers of the world to come"; heaven has been opened to our view, and the ascending and descending angels fling its benedictions round us; the high ideals of life, so sacredly peremptory, so winsomely persuasive, are our law; the fulness of God's love is our satisfying portion, our enduring wealth; and the everlasting home awaits us, as brethren and sisters of the Firstborn.

This royal principle of the freedom of spiritual faith has not been without its testing, even as history has

abundantly tested the other also. "By their roots ye shall know them," it has been somewhat grimly said, is practically the motto of one method of husbandry; but the Chief Husbandman said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." The very principle of ecclesiasticism is demoralising, as being despiritualising. For ecclesiasticism, as we have seen, is essentially materialistic in its governing principle; and may we not trace the natural working of such a principle in the realm of conduct and character? Who will venture to say that a pure and gracious spiritual character, a holy and loving life, has been the *sine quâ non* of ecclesiastical requirement in the past? and where is the evidence that even now it is insisted upon as the essential, compared with which all else is vain? Is it not rather true that to be a loyal Churchman is, with many, the main thing, and that the humblest and holiest, outside the sacred pale, is looked upon askance in comparison with one who, with whatever unspirituality, or even moral laxity, is a true son of the Church? How relentlessly Rome, according to her own confession, has cast out heretics, however holy! But how tolerant she has been of the moral delinquencies, or even atrocities, of her own children! For who hears of excommunication, even because of lifelong vice, if there be but compliance with the rules and routine of the Church?

This is not to say that vice cannot thrive where the evangelical faith is cherished, nor that unspirituality is impossible within its sphere. But it is at least true that by this faith unspirituality is condemned, as its most flagrant contradiction, being worse

than the worst "heresy"; and that vice is absolutely repudiated, as a denial of the Lord. No adherence to a system is countenanced as condoning unrighteousness, or as a substitute for personal devotion to the living Christ.

History gives its verdict concerning the result in either case; and it has been well said that, as "The truest scientific hypothesis is that which, as we say, 'works' best . . . it can be no otherwise with religious hypotheses" (*The Will to Believe, and Other Essays*, Wm. James, p. xii). "For the *ultima ratio* of every creed, the *ultima ratio* of truth itself, is that it *works*" (*Man's Place in the Cosmos, and Other Essays*, Andrew Seth, p. 307). What, then, is the verdict? Speaking of the effect of the Reformation on life generally, one of our leading economists says, "The natural gravity and intrepidity of the stern races that had settled on the shores of England inclined them to embrace the doctrines of the Reformation; and these reacted on their habits of life, and gave a tone to their industry. Man was, as it were, ushered straight into the presence of his Creator, with no human intermediary: life became intense and full of awe; and now for the first time large numbers of rude and uncultured people yearned towards the mysteries of absolute spiritual freedom. The isolation of each person's religious responsibility from that of his fellows, rightly understood, was a necessary condition for the highest spiritual progress. . . . Individualism governed by the temper of the Reformed religion intensified family life, making it deeper and purer, and holier than it had ever been before. . . . The family affections of those races which have adopted the Reformed

religion are the richest and fullest of earthly feelings: there never has been before any material of texture at once so strong and so fine, with which to build up a noble fabric of social life" (*Principles of Economics*, Alfred Marshall, vol. i. pp. 36, 37). And another notable writer says, commenting on this and kindred facts, "It is probable that the changes in doctrine which had principally contributed to produce this result were those which had tended to bring the individual soul into more intimate contact with the actual life and example of the Founder of Christianity, and therefore with the essential spirit that underlay our religious system and served to distinguish it from all other systems. As has been frequently correctly pointed out, the characteristic feature of Latin Christianity was different. This form has always tended, as it still tends, to treat as of the first importance, not the resulting change in character in the individual, but rather his belief in the authority of the Church and of an order of men, and in the supreme efficacy of sacramental ordinances which the Church has decreed itself alone competent to dispense. On the other hand, the central idea of the Reformation was the necessity for a spiritual change in the individual" (*Social Evolution*, Benjamin Kidd, pp. 297, 298).

"If any man trusteth in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again with himself, that, even as he is Christ's, so also are we. . . . For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves: but they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with

themselves, are without understanding. . . . But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. x. 7, 12, 17, 18).

The principles of a free, spiritual Christianity will abide the twofold test of Scripture and of history, while they are in accord with the highest reason, and with the noblest and most generous of our moral aspirations. So far, then, from speaking hesitatingly and apologetically of our position, as open to the suspicion of illegitimacy, we ought rather to glory that ours is so high a calling, so rich an inheritance, so glorious a hope.

City of God, how broad and far  
 Outspread thy walls sublime!  
 The true thy chartered freemen are,  
 Of every age and clime.

How gleam thy watchfires through the night  
 With never-fainting ray!  
 How rise thy towers, serene and bright,  
 To meet the dawning day!

In vain the surge's angry shock,  
 In vain the drifting sands;  
 Unharmed upon the Eternal Rock  
 The Eternal City stands.

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